

A Treatise with Stalemates

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Characters:

Todoroki Shouto, Hatake Kakashi, Kouda Kouji, Satou Rikidou, Shouji Mezou, Tokoyami Fumikage, Hagakure Tooru, Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Nedzu (My Hero Academia), Midoriya Izuku, Bakugou Katsuki

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A Treatise with Stalemates

by [ewfte](#)

Summary

How Todoroki Shouto saved the world, and what he lost along the way.

UPDATE: June 4, 2021

This fic is on permanent hiatus. I published everything I had in my docs (including the next two chapters and outlines). More info is in chapter 12.

Motivation

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The thing about leaving a bad situation, Todoroki muses as he pours way too much pepper on his scrambled eggs, is that you expect to get better immediately.

He grabs his plate off the counter of the common room, steps around the pile of dirty clothes one of the third years dropped by the stairwell, and climbs to the second story. There, he shoves an elbow against the doorknob of his room and puts his shoulder to the dark wood.

Todoroki waits till the door has completely shut before sinking down against it. He subconsciously checks his window, the door to his closet, the corners for anything that might be lurking there. Only then does he pull his mask down to his neck and shovel eggs into his face.

Even with the pepper, it still doesn't taste like anything.

Todoroki has checked, clicked through pages of WebMD to see if this is bad. Or rather, if it is harmful enough to impede him significantly. He doesn't have any infections, no swelling in his face, no head injuries he knows of. The last time he smoked was on the roof of his dorm last weekend, when he went through a whole pack while mulling over the Hero Killer problem.

He felt guilty about it afterwards, almost as soon as the nicotine high crashed. It's a terrible habit that he never quite managed to drop in his old world. It was born from war and anxiety and the constant stress of missions. He should have kicked it back then, should have never started now but his throat swells up sometimes and tries to

choke him.

At least his food doesn't taste horrible, just bland and thick in his mouth.

He finishes and sets his plate where he will remember to take it down to the kitchen tomorrow. There's a neat stack of folded clothes he could put away while listening to a podcast or a set of textbooks to read to get even further ahead of the curriculum. His futon is unmade and a strip of moonlight is shining down on his balcony, reflecting pure white against the metal railing.

It's almost two a.m., Todoroki thinks. Tomorrow they hear about agencies and after school he arranged a practice session in a U.A. field. Midoriya is supposed to meet him there, something about improving his quirk that he didn't quite follow but is prepared for.

He should crawl into bed now. Instead he wants to sit against the solid wood of his door and watch the dark blue clouds move across the night sky.

It's not an entirely rational thought, the one that keeps bouncing around in his head. It is a strange amalgamation of guilt and frustration and melancholy he can't quite shake. Again and again, it repeats he should be showing remarkable improvement in his psyche.

Todoroki knows this is an expectation that will not present in reality. He has been down this path multiple times. There have been two wars waged in his lifetime, seven years in black ops, countless amounts of trauma that he has struggled through and overcome. It gives him perspective, a new frame to look at grief and damage from.

Fifteen years is a long time to mourn.

But it's not only that. He has mourned for much longer for people he knew even less than those he left behind. It is just, well, fifteen years is a long time to live while floundering for a purpose. There have been brief bursts of things he wants to do, motivation to adjust and desire to learn everything this world has to offer, but nothing that has been constant.

To put it simply, Todoroki doesn't have a goal he can strive for. He has a faint dream that he has already shelved as impossible. The perfect grades in school, the path to becoming a hero, the entrance exam and the tournament, that has all been another man's goal thrust upon him.

He is still blindly walking that path, even without the looming incentive of Endeavor. There is no reason to follow it, and he still rebels against the thought of being labeled a *hero*, but he has made no effort to move.

Konoha was structured perfectly for him. It was something he could die for, a symbol he could burn into his lungs and feel with every breath. That was where his pack lived, where his friends lived, where his family was buried. He was pointed at a target and let loose and he knew what he was doing was to protect his home. Even when he was the one assigning missions, he did so to fulfill the needs of his nation.

Here, Todoroki feels like a half finished person. He lacks the same attachments, has missed the same indoctrination and patriotism other children have. Here he is a mess of memory and anxiety and a personality that wildly fluctuates between the dry, unfazed humor of a thirty year old man and the stuttering manner of a child who can only react to what is thrown at him.

Last night he woke up from a dream with a scream clenched between his teeth. Todoroki shoved himself in the corner of his closet and held

a knife in a shaking fist and dry-heaved as his vision flickered. After forty minutes of gasping breathes and choking down bile, he realized he had punched a hole in the wall.

Tonight, the imprint of his knuckles catches the pale light of the moon and stands out as an obvious imperfection against the cream walls. Todoroki swears that something must be different here; that without chakra, endocrine systems must work differently. He never had panic attacks this bad and this regular through twenty-five years of military service.

This lingering PTSD is reminiscent of the weeks after Obito's death. It creeps up the back of his neck and makes him twitchy and it has been affecting him. His sleep schedule is shit and he is dropping things. Little mistakes that could accumulate and become a serious issue.

Todoroki finally shuffles over to his futon and falls against it. Tomorrow, he swears to himself, tomorrow he will deal with this.

It's not necessarily a lie, even though Todoroki is very good at those. There is no way he will be able to create purpose for himself in a day. But he will make progress, he will.

Even when he feels lost in this world, Todoroki forces himself to push forward. That is who he is at his core: dissatisfied and painfully aware he could do more.

There is no memorial to make promises to. There is no nation to protect. One day he will suffer self-realization. He will flounder and fall and even as Todoroki is painfully aware of this, he continues tearing himself apart, rushing forward to this fate. It is either that or giving up, and Todoroki would sooner die than be someone who decides to quit, who fails and is responsible for the death of a person he could have protected.

Todoroki shoves his bare face against his pillow and breathes out.

Tomorrow, he will work this out tomorrow.

Chapter End Notes

Sad man eats eggs and thinks about life.

Next update is Monday. We're still on the angst train, fellas. Part two will return with the boys, hero names, and a concerning conversation. Thank you Rose for screaming in the discord voice chat and completely destroying my eardrums. I love your enthusiasm.

Hero Names

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The dorms for students staying on campus are about a quarter of a mile away from the main building of U.A. This makes waking up a more manageable task, as Todoroki can sleep until the last second.

He finally passed out at three last night and only jolted awake once at about six a.m. At seven thirty he hauls himself up for a five-minute shower under freezing water and walks out of the dorms ten minutes later.

Todoroki catches up to Satou as the other boy is about to walk into homeroom. They nod sleepily at each other before Satou offers a fist. Todoroki bumps it. They walk into the classroom.

Todoroki internally sings his praises to every god in the universe as he catches sight of Shouji sitting with three cups of coffee on his desk. Kouda is already in his chair, finishing up what looks to be Hero Art History homework, and Tokoyami is perched atop his desk sipping his chai latte through a straw.

Satou collapses half on Shouji, leaning an elbow on one of his massive shoulders and dropping the side of his face into Shouji's white hair.

"Shouji, the light of my life, a hero among men," Satou begins. Shouji raises an eyebrow and Tokoyami looks on, extremely confused and somewhat worried. "Bless you." Satou whispers as he takes his black coffee and drains half of it in one gulp.

Jirou, sitting behind Shouji, turns to Todoroki. “Is he okay?”

Todoroki shrugs and pats Shouji on the back while grabbing his red eye. Exams are in a month and a half and the creeping stress has been getting to everyone. Class rankings are coming out in a few weeks and Todoroki’s peers are more alert to every red slash on the essays Aizawa hands back.

Kouda looks up from his homework to sign at Todoroki. ‘He stayed up late finishing Present Mic-sensei’s English assignment.’

“The one assigned a month ago?” Tokoyami asks.

Kouda nods.

Satou makes his way back to his desk in time to catch Tokoyami’s exaggerated look of judgment. They start a conversation with Sero about the workload and Todoroki puts in his earbuds. There are about ten minutes until class starts and he has enough time to finish one more article about the up and coming vigilante idol Pop Star.

He hears, “Satou, you are the physical representation of the darkness lurking in men’s hearts, the voice of the void calling us to lose the inhibitions that bind us to everyday necessities like homework. How have you survived this long?”

“Damn Tokoyami, that was vicious. I was gonna bring you food too.”

A pause, “Apple pie?”

Satou rests his arms on Todoroki's desk. Todoroki moves his phone to make room. "Well, I was gonna bring devil's food cake because that's your aesthetic, but I'm flexible."

Satou reaches up and pulls an earbud out of Todoroki's ear. "By the way dude, what are you listening to?"

"Todoroki likes sixties rock." Tokoyami starts to say something but hesitates. "I was going to ridicule you on your taste, but you would insist that it is ironic. Or worse, have no shame."

"That's coming from the guy who listens to Deathgrips, MCR, and Beyoncé interchangeably," Satou laughs while he puts in the earbud. Tokoyami makes an offended noise.

Satou's face screws up in concentration. He looks at Todoroki, who is barely concealing a grin, then looks at the article on his phone.

"Todoroki, are you listening to a podcast in English while reading an article in Japanese?"

Even Kouda looks up at this. "What the fuck," Sero asks, turning around.

Todoroki looks Satou straight in the eyes. "Well, you know how it is."

Satou blinks. Tokoyami leans forward with anticipation.

With a serious expression Todoroki deadpans, "I am always on that

grind.”

Satou falls out of his chair.

The bell rings and Aizawa-sensei enters the classroom. Satou gets back in his chair with a burning face as Asui comments on the lack of bandages wrapping their homeroom teacher’s face.

Aizawa-sensei informs the class that they will be choosing their hero aliases before revealing the pro-hero offers to students. Todoroki is not surprised at the number of requests he received, but it is a bit alarming to realize how many hero agencies are out there.

Todoroki: 5,078

Bakugou: 3,156

Uraraka: 532

Tokoyami: 360

Yaoyorozu: 297

Iida: 272

Asui: 219

Kirishima: 108

Kaminari: 58

Shouji: 43

Sero: 7

There’s a pause where everyone takes in the vast gap between Todoroki’s number of offers and everyone else’s. Across the room, Uraraka shrieks and grabs Iida by the shoulders. Asui is grinning and

Kirishima, Sero, and Kaminari engage in a three way high five. Anger-issues looks vaguely constipated but only growls.

“Well done as always, Todoroki.” Yaoyorozu offers.

Todoroki just nods. Both Iida and Yaoyorozu were eliminated in the first round but they have more offers than everyone who made it into the second round. Kaminari, Shouji, and Sero also received offers but most likely did so based on the power they showed rather than their legacies.

Midnight saunters into the room to assist with hero names as Aizawa-sensei steps away from the lectern to go curl up in the corner. Whiteboards are passed out and a fifteen-minute time limit is given.

Todoroki looks at board. He has a couple names he could use, nicknames from another world, but none that would make sense or be appropriate. Even fewer that he actually *likes*. There’s Copy Ninja, Kakashi of Sharingan, Hero of the Sharingan, Cold Blooded Kakashi, Friend Killer, and Sixth Hokage.

Tokoyami turns around in his seat and looks at Todoroki. He raises an eyebrow and Tokoyami shows him the white board. ‘Tsukuyomi’ or Jet Black.

Redundant, but it fits. The kanji is different from the Tsukuyomi he has experienced before, and that is putting that encounter lightly. Todoroki pushes that memory away and looks over at Satou and Kouda.

“Did you name yourself ‘Jet Black, the jet black hero?’” Satou asks Tokoyami.

“Yes, *Sugarman*?”

“Got me there,” Satou acknowledges before cheering for Shouji and going up to present.

Todoroki looks over his board again. He debates pulling out one of the books he has in his backpack and just ignoring the whole thing, but while Midnight might approve of his reading choices, Aizawa does not.

Instead he scribbles something down and makes his way up to the front of the room when his name is called.

“Todoroki.”

There is audible confusion. Someone asks, “Your last name?”

“Yeah,” Todoroki replies. It is partly symbolic, partly petty, and partly just easy to remember. He walks back to his seat and accepts a puzzled but by no means less enthusiastic fist bump from Satou.

Aizawa-sensei drops an enormous stack of paper on his desk, breaking Todoroki out of his thoughts. “Come to the Principle’s office after school,” Aizawa-sensei says before moving on.

Todoroki looks down at the pile. One hundred and ten pages. He sighs to himself and resolves to scan through the list during the rest of homeroom and finish research on agencies tonight.

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Todoroki heads towards Nedzu's office hoping that this conversation will be short. He has to meet Midoriya on the U.A. practice fields in fifteen minutes and he doesn't want to be late.

He walks into the office and is greeted by Nedzu, Aizawa, and Present Mic sitting at a table with stacks of paperwork in front of them. Todoroki's face twitches underneath his facemask. He takes a seat and resolves to text Midoriya later and apologize.

Nedzu is the first person to speak. "Tea?" He asks.

Todoroki nods and takes the cup offered to him.

"You might be wondering what the subject of this meeting is."

Todoroki does not respond. The question is rhetorical. It is also a bit uncalled for, but Todoroki gets the feeling Nedzu is dramatic in personality and circuitous in speech.

"And you might be surprised to find that this meeting is on two subjects!"

On Nedzu's left, Aizawa's eyes have dropped to the folder he holds. Present Mic's hand twitches around his cup. Both men look like they have witnessed something disgusting.

Todoroki thinks back to what he has done lately. Nothing comes to mind. Their reactions must be towards an external factor.

“I shall be going over these subjects in the order in which they occurred. So the first is about the incident at the Unforeseen Simulation Joint” Nedzu says happily.

His tone does not change when he continues, but something about him becomes more pointed, more threatening. Todoroki does not move away as Nedzu leans in, “At the beginning of the era of Quirks, legislation was put into place to prevent the everyday use of the powers humans now wielded. The profession of ‘hero’ was created to assist the police and government as what once were mundane crimes grew in severity. There is a big difference between a man robbing a store with a gun and a man robbing a store with the ability to become nigh invincible.

“Even with the onslaught of more severe crimes, there was still backlash from the public about legalizing the use of powers that could so easily kill. The decision only escaped criticism when our predecessors, the first heroes of our world, acted morally and complied with the law.”

Oh, Todoroki thinks.

“And when people without permission in the form of hero licenses or explicit instructions from professionals act outside the bounds of the law, that reflects poorly on all of us. Especially when those people injure or kill others.

“Even against someone like the Noumu, your actions were not permissible.”

Todoroki knows about these laws in a very abstract sense. He has researched vigilantes and the origins of pro-heroes extensively, so he must. But they never seemed to strike him like other laws had.

Maybe it is because they were not logical in his mind. The Noumu was a threat to himself and his classmates, so he dealt with it. The creature has already incapacitated Aizawa and had sufficiently damaged All Might to the point where Todoroki was unsure about the end result of their battle.

He had the power and the knowledge to stop that from happening, so he did. But as always, bureaucracy gets in the way.

“Fortunately for you,” Nedzu continues, “the encounter with the Noumu falls under self-defense. It barely makes that category, because of the presence of pro-heroes there, but it does. And that is what is preventing the police from dealing with you strictly and impartially.”

Nedzu leans back to sip at his tea. There is beat of silence while Todoroki digests that information.

Aizawa drops the folder he was sifting through on the table. It lands with a solid thud and a tongue of stapled paperwork flaps out the manila envelope. Present Mic’s mouth twitches.

“As your homeroom teacher, I will be in charge of your punishment.” Aizawa rests his jaw against his hand and stares at Todoroki. “We will be going over the laws governing hero activities. Tomorrow after school we will discuss your assignment.”

Todoroki grits his teeth and nods. An additional assignment will take away from his time to work on his... extracurricular activities, but it cannot be helped. He will have to postpone the update for the chat

site to another day.

“Now,” Nedzu says, “let us move on to the second subject of our conversation.”

Aizawa’s face has changed, grown stony and marred with a line between his brows. Present Mic’s earlier expression of suppressed anger resurfaces. Nedzu sets his cup of tea down with a harsh click.

“Let us talk about your father.”

Chapter End Notes

Todoroki doesn't even both to have an opinion on his father. However, he thinks his siblings should have a better name to associate themselves with than 'Endeavor'.

There's not a whole lot of information in the manga about Quirk law. They do seem very nit-picky though. I can see how Iida going after Hero Killer would be illegal, but what about Izuku? Is the use of his Quirk illegal because he is intervening without a hero's permission? If so, when his life is in danger after he intervenes, can he legally use his Quirk? Or does his first action condemn him? Can someone start a fight without using their Quirk and be legally justified to use their Quirk when they start getting beat up?

Next chapter has gratuitous Izuku fanboying, theories about Todoroki's Quirk, some actual plot, and, as always, angst. See you Wednesday!

Realizations

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

To say Todoroki was expecting this topic to come up is a drastic overstatement. When Nedzu mentioned another subject, Todoroki assumed it would be on his grades or his performance at the Sport's Festival or literally anything else but his home life.

It is not that Todoroki underestimated Present Mic's sympathy. Rather it just never occurred to him that the school board would care, let alone attempt to do something about it.

Todoroki is jaded; that is who he is. He is a pessimist, a firm believer in expecting the worst and being prepared for it.

(A firm believer that he deserves this. This is penance and he has so many sins to suffer for and every gift life gives him is suspect.)

Life is not fair to the point of being pointlessly cruel, that is how the universe works. It will drop something on you with the impartiality of a man knocking a brick off a roof and not realizing it has hit a passerby below. Todoroki has been living under the impression for years that Endeavor was just another one of these bricks, something afflicted on him that only he will have to deal with.

Endeavor is the Number Two Hero, a public figure, a powerful man who has a stranglehold on the media to the point where he has a fleet of lawyers employed against slander. He is rich and unrelenting and furious when roused. For years, Todoroki understood that there was nothing he could do to stop the man.

Now Present Mic, Aizawa, and Nedzu sit before him.

They say, "We need a statement to open an abuse case."

And, "We will be able to convict him with the evidence you and your siblings provide."

And, "He will be stripped of the majority of his hero duties and a restraining order will be issued."

And, "You will be able to become a ward of the state, where you will

be protected.”

And, “We know this is a difficult decision, Todoroki. We are here to help you.”

Todoroki’s face is blank, he knows this. His breathing is steady and his hands do not shake and his mind is white, empty space.

He had never considered this outcome to the conversation he had with Present Mic in an unused classroom three weeks ago. He thought there would be sentiment and respite aided by Endeavor’s vague confirmation he could stay in the dorms, provided Todoroki use the facilities and his proximity to them well.

Todoroki looks at the three teachers in front of him. He opens his mouth, closes it, breathes.

When he is certain he will not sound lost, he answers.

“No,” Todoroki says.

Present Mic cracks the pen he was holding in his hand. He looks pained. Aizawa’s frown deepens. Nedzu is the only one unchanged, the same considering look in his beady eyes as before.

“Todoroki,” Aizawa says, “as your teachers, it is our duty to help you.”

“We know you are in a bad situation,” Present Mic continues, “please, Todoroki. We have helped students in similar circumstances before.”

“I refuse.”

“Is it his hero status?” Present Mic asks. He looks distressed, looks desperate in the face of Todoroki’s apathy. “It does not matter how powerful he is, Todoroki, we can help you.”

Todoroki shakes his head. He is not worried about Endeavor hurting him, hasn’t been in years. He is not denying these offers for his own sake.

“May I ask why?” Nedzu says, cutting off Present Mic. The considering light has not faded.

“Endeavor is the number two pro-hero,” Todoroki begins. Aizawa looks like he is going to interrupt, but Todoroki continues. “There has been a steady increase in crime rates over the past five years. With the emergence of the League of Villains, an organized group the likes of

which have not been seen since the beginning of All Might's career, there is a significant risk of deadlier, more concentrated attacks like the one we saw at the U.S.J.

"The leader there, Shigaraki, implied the League developed or were developing more Noumu. Only one Noumu was needed to down a pro-hero and injure another.

"Regardless of Endeavor's behavior and actions against me, society would only suffer from his removal from the pro-hero business. He has the largest number of successful takedowns and incarcerations of organized crime rings in history."

Todoroki looks at the three men in front of him. Two of them stare back while the shadow of a smile has started to curl around Nedzu's snout. "These past five years have already been a source of worry with the public, in terms of crime rate and All Might's decreased impact. Imagine what would happen if the world discovered the Number Two Hero, a man almost as prolific as All Might, was guilty of domestic abuse."

A piece of Present Mic's broken pen falls to the ground. The sound echoes in the office.

"Very well," Nedzu speaks suddenly. Both Aizawa and Present Mic turn to look at him. "Would you consider becoming a ward of the state without leveling accusations against Endeavor? This will limit his control over your life and make your residence in the dorms more legally justifiable."

"Nedzu, you can't be--"

"I accept," Todoroki says.

"Then we are done here," Nedzu stands to clear the tea set, not making any note of Todoroki's still full cup.

"Nedzu--"

Todoroki stands and dips his head at the principle. "Thank you," he says before turning to leave.

"Todoroki!"

Present Mic catches him at the door. "Todoroki, you don't have to do this. This is not your burden to bear, kiddo. No matter what Endeavor

does to benefit people, it does not make up for what he has done to you.”

“Of course it doesn’t.” Todoroki replies.

Present Mic grips his shoulder. “If it doesn’t, then-”

“Hizashi,” Aizawa interrupts. He is scribbling something against a loose piece of notebook paper. He rip it off and hands it to Todoroki.

Todoroki looks down. It’s a string of numbers. The bottom of an eight has been cut off where the paper was torn.

“I know you are living in the dorms right now, but I want you to call me if anything happens with him.”

Aizawa leans down and places his hand on Todoroki’s other shoulder. “I will be there, no questions asked. Just contact me.”

He pulls Present Mic away when Todoroki nods. They stay like that, Aizawa gripping Present Mic’s elbow, as they watch Todoroki walk down the hallway.

Present Mic rubs a hand over his face. Then he does it again, almost knocking his glasses off his nose. Aizawa uses his grip on the other man’s elbow to guide him to his office. He shuts the door behind them and watches Hizashi’s shoulders sag.

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Todoroki arrives at the practice field a few minutes after his meeting and hopes that Midoriya has not left yet. However, the field is empty. Todoroki changes in the nearby bathroom with a sigh and starts stretching. He already requested the field to train so he might as well make use of it.

He is just about to lower himself into the splits when Midoriya tears out one of U.A.’s side doors and starts sprinting his way.

“I’m sorry, Todoroki! All Might wanted to talk to me after class about hero agencies and I didn’t realize how long we had been going for. Have you been waiting for me? I’m so sorry!”

“Ah.” Todoroki watches Midoriya fumble with his blazer buttons and cram the jacket into his backpack. “I was in a meeting too, no worries.”

“Alright,” Midoriya says while clapping his hands together. “You wanted advice with your Quirk?”

Todoroki takes a minute to observe his fellow student. Midoriya is rolling his sleeves up and some of his hair is plastered across his forehead from his sprint over. He picks up a notebook tossed almost carelessly to the ground in the rush to get his blazer off. The title reads, ‘Analysis No. 14.’

Midoriya flips through the notebook and Todoroki can see sketches and cramped handwriting lining each page. He pauses about halfway through and leans into Todoroki’s space to show him what is written.

Todoroki Shouto

Hero alias: Todoroki

Quirk: Half-Hot, Half-Cold

Todoroki has dual pyrokinesis and cryokinesis, divided between his left and right side. Todoroki can produce ice on his right side and fire on his left. The only perceivable limiter on the amount of fire/ice he can produce is his body temperature.

Possible theories:

Molecular manipulation of both hydrogen and oxygen?

Supporting evidence: Todoroki is able to produce ice without nearby water sources and does not appear to grow dehydrated after producing large ice creations. Likewise, he is able to produce gout of fire without any apparent fuel source or spark. If Todoroki is able to manipulate hydrogen and oxygen (and possibly compounds in addition to H₂O), he would be able to pull water vapor from the air and combine hydrogen and oxygen atoms to produce ice. He would also be able to produce the highly combustible diatomic gas hydrogen as a fuel source for fire and maintain fires by ‘feeding’ them oxygen. This could also be how he directs his fire, by creating a path of H₂ and oxygen.

Flaws in theory: The amount of energy needed to combine and break compounds needs to come from somewhere, and Half-Hot Half-Cold’s only apparent drawback is Todoroki’s need to maintain body temperature.

Additional skills: Talented in hand to hand combat (good enough to beat Ojiro, nidan in Judo), can use knives in combat (according to Hagakure, two Ka-Bar incorporated in hero costume), excellent strategist (I tried talking to Shouji about their Battle Trial but he told me to ask Todoroki directly, will follow up later), and intelligent (top

three in class, will confirm when rankings are passed back).

The sketch that accompanies this information shows Todoroki in his hero costume, a design reminiscent of his brief stint as Hokage. There are arrows highlighting different points of the drawing. A few point out the features of his costumes, the knives, plate armor, and steel-toed boots, while the rest seem whimsical. One arrow points to his eye patch and mask with the tag 'Mysterious!' while another aimed at his arms reads 'Muscular.'

Todoroki looks up at Midoriya after he is done reading. The other boy stares at him for a second before turning bright red.

"Oh, uh, sorry I didn't ask before. I just like to, um, analyze Quirks?" Midoriya stutters.

Todoroki raises an eyebrow. He's smiling under his mask, not that Midoriya can see through the thick fabric. Midoriya reminds him of Sakura, in a way. Hard working and strong but prone to episodes of self-doubt.

"It is very detailed." Todoroki offers. Midoriya visibly sweats. "I had not considered your theory about molecular manipulation. I don't believe it's entirely correct but it is well thought-out."

At this Midoriya perks up. He starts to ramble about atmospheric composition and how levels of humidity could change how long it takes Todoroki to produce ice or fire.

Todoroki nods along. He's not humoring Midoriya; this genuinely is interesting. When he tells the other boy about his attempts at generating electrostatic discharge by manipulating fronts, Midoriya's voice gets soft and he starts to chew on a pen.

Todoroki waits. This is what he was aiming for when he first started talking to Midoriya. The kid has a mind for analysis that eclipses any adult Todoroki knows. If anyone can help Todoroki regain the signatures he left in another world, it would be him.

"Can you start generating ice? Cold air would be even better but I don't think you're able to. Try to keep producing it until we notice a change in the weather."

Todoroki nods and gets to work.

Ten minutes into attempting to create a continuously growing, large

plane of ice, Todoroki's teeth are clenched against chattering and the hairs on his arms are standing straight up against the cold. It is going far more slower than he expected, as he has to pause almost every minute to flush heat through his body.

It is also incredibly difficult for him to shape his ice in such a precise manner over such a large stretch of space. Organic shapes, like spears and jagged spikes, are easier than the column he has produced. So far, it is about fifty meters in diameter with a height of around seventy meters and still growing.

"Hey, Todoroki."

He stops producing ice and looks back at Midoriya. The kid rubs at his mouth with one hand and Todoroki can practically see him organize a question.

"I think that, um. You come from—your dad is the number two hero. Just watching clips of him using his Quirk, it looks like his Quirk is much more powerful than yours is."

Todoroki slowly sits down on the frost-covered grass. He lets fire well up from his chest and circulate around his limbs as he listens to Midoriya.

"But as my journal mentioned, based on previous conversations with you and our match in the sports festival, the only drawback of your Quirk is that you need to regulate your body temperature. And that should be relatively easy for you, given the level of your control.

"I mean," Midoriya's voice lowers and he starts to mumble to himself, "if you were able to create skates at the sports festival, which could hold your weight and function like metal blades could, that indicates that you have incredible precision. And you were able to make a clear barrier of ice during our match, which means you are skilled enough to remove air bubbles from you—"

"It was the fire," Todoroki interrupts.

"Wha-?" Midoriya is jarred out of his info-dump haze.

"Creating transparent ice is incredibly difficult. Boiling purified water is the easiest way to make it. That's why I first made ice then thawed and boiled it with fire, before freezing the water again."

"And then you created a fire ball once you had made an airtight ice

cover. So the fire consumed the available oxygen, suffocating me until I almost passed out.” Midoriya claps the side of his fist to his open palm in realization. “The transparent glacier not only prevented oxygen from reaching us, but it also allowed the crowd and the proctors to see that we were fine. If the glacier had been solid, they would have likely ended the match at the end of the first minute we were in there.

“And that is also why you rushed towards me,” Midoriya’s eyes are shining when he looks at Todoroki. “When I punched a hole in the glacier, there was a rapid re-introduction of air into an oxygen-depleted environment, causing a backdraft!”

Todoroki nods. “I encased myself in ice to withstand the explosion. You were not as lucky-”

“And I was caught in the explosion, knocking me out. Todoroki, that’s brilliant!”

Todoroki scratches the back of his head. “Ah, it was nothing.”

“No, it’s great. Did you think all of that up on the spot or was this a strategy you had been planning? This must be why you rarely depend on your Quirk, you don’t need it to fight well!”

Midoriya must see his confusion because he continues. “I thought you were still not giving the competition your all, because you should have been able to create giant walls of ice and huge balls of fire and knock me out that way. Instead you used your intelligence. This lines up perfectly with what Hagakure told me: you used your ice to trap the villains at the U.S.J., but threatened them with a knife instead of your Quirk.”

“And then with the Noumu,” Midoriya looks nauseated when he mentions the creature, but does not pause. “You saw that its injuries healed, so after you—you removed its head, you cauterized the wound so nothing would grow back. But you still had your knife out, you would have tried to, um, to fight it with that.”

Todoroki nods.

“That’s what makes you different from the majority of heroes! You are like Aizawa-sensei, you only use your Quirk in addition to your regular abilities. You are not dependent on it, like others with offensive-based Quirks are.”

Midoriya drops to the ground beside Todoroki and stares at the giant column of ice. “Imagine what you could do if you relied more on your Quirk. I bet you could create giant ice walls larger than the sports festival complex. Imagine if you could manipulate both your fire and ice at that same magnitude, the explosions from rapidly heating cold air could easily take out those zero-point robots.

“And this-” Midoriya gestures to the ice column, “with enough practice, you should be able to create something this size in only a couple minutes. That is how you create lightning, you keep pushing yourself to make huge creations until you can affect the weather!”

As if on cue, the air pressure abruptly drops. The clouds that had been lazily drifting pool above the column and Todoroki feels the wind pick up. Midoriya scrambles to his feet and looks up.

“Todoroki!” He turns to smile at Todoroki and his eyes are like two beacons of green light against the rapidly darkening sky. He reaches a hand out and Todoroki realizes that Midoriya has dimples.

Todoroki takes his hand and allows himself to be pulled up.

“Fire!” Midoriya blurts out. “We need the cloud to be bigger. There has to be a bit that stretches up to the atmosphere and spreads out horizontally, like an anvil. That’s where graupel forms and where positively charged ice crystals will collect.”

Midoriya grabs two handfuls of Todoroki’s t-shirt and pushes him over to the ice. Todoroki stumbles but follows dutifully with a small smile hidden under his mask. Midoriya’s stuttering completely stops when he gets excited.

“If you start heating the ice, you’ll make water vapor. Come on!”

Later, when their time on the field has run out and they are forced to leave with only dark clouds hanging over their heads, Midoriya asks about Todoroki’s pro-hero picks.

“I got one offer,” Midoriya says. They are in the nearby bathroom. Todoroki is changing out of work clothes while Midoriya is changing into his. Apparently Midoriya runs home after school on Mondays. “Gran Torino, an old homeroom teacher here.”

“I received quite a few.” Todoroki thinks back to the one hundred and ten pages of offers and tries not to shudder. He is not looking forward to sorting through all of those agencies.

Todoroki pulls his shirt off over his head and bends over his bag to grab a clean one. When he stands up, he notices Midoriya staring at him.

He flips his shirt around to find the right opening. Midoriya just blinks. Todoroki looks down at his chest. Maybe he forgot to cover a burn?

There's a giant knot of sickly yellow right over his ribs where Hagakure punched him during their weekly spar. A medical patch is taped to a cut on his left hip and ace bandages encircle his left elbow that is recovering from slight lateral epicondylitis. Nothing bleeding or broken that he can see.

Todoroki raises an eyebrow while he pulls his shirt on. Midoriya seems to jolt out of his daze and his face glows bright red.

He was wondering about the injuries, Todoroki decides.

"S-sorry. So, um, which one are you going to accept? Did you get any offers from the top ten, beside your dad?"

"I want to find an underground agency that specializes with vigilante activity and organized crime." Todoroki grabs his bag and heads out of the bathroom. He waves goodbye to Midoriya as he steps outside. "I didn't receive any offers from Endeavor Hero Agency."

His phone chimes when he walks up the stairwell of the dorms. One notification from AntiBoard. Todoroki hums to himself as he opens the app.

-

/banned_feed/ CREATED (Mon)17:24 BY gayjackiechan

gayjackichan

> villain/vigilante feed

> updates/clips/discussion only, no spam/bait

gayjackiechan

> @rokudaime.hokage Hero Killer spotted moving in Hosu

k1lj0y

> The hero Ingenium has been moved from Intensive Care to Progressive Recovery

> Sources on staff say Ingenium is paralyzed from waist down, not expected to return to hero work

gayjackiechan
> press f to pay respects

sharkfuckah
> f

thotpatrol_6969
> f

dronehead
> @rokudaime.hokage I will be going afk to keep track of Hero Killer
> @k1llj0y expect visual of future attacks, I took sick leave to work on this
-

Todoroki shuts his door behind him. He opens his laptop and pulls the stack of offers out of his bag. The first few pages have folded up along the edges. Todoroki holds the curling edges down with a textbook as he replies to the chat site.

-
> > WELCOME rokudaime.hokage TO dis/banned_feed/

rokudaime.hokage
> any updates from @uknoihad2?
> any further contact from reformers?

sharkfuckah
> I've heard nothing

k1llj0y
> Reformers have been raided by police and heroes
> An anonymous tip was sent to the Genius Office last Friday at 21:45
> Police and heroes arrived on scene to find Reformers' members unconscious and without Quirks

gayjackiechan
> wot

k1llj0y
> Quirks returned to most members after 24 hours
> Known leaders Scuttlebug (Quirk: enhanced speed) and Caribou (Quirk: temperature manipulation) remain Quirkless and in comas

sharkfuckah
> what the fuck

thotpatrol_4200
>rest in peace @uknoi had2
-

Todoroki types 'iPhome Hero Agency' into the search engine while uncapping a pen with his teeth. Ideas swim behind his eyes, strategies piecing themselves together and a plan forming.

He draws a thick line of ink through the first offer and moves to the second. He has work to do.

Chapter End Notes

It's still Wednesday in my timezone. Sorry if this is late for anyone else. I'll try to get to replying to comments eventually but I've been busy.

Some new information and comparisons between Todoroki and Todokashi (Kakaroki?). We know (cannon) Todoroki is probably trained in martial arts but the majority of his fights involve him standing back and using his Quirk. Todokashi is used to fighting mostly using hand to hand and melee weapons. In the Naruto world, this was because of the threat of Chakra Exhaustion. In bnha, Todokashi never goes all out with his Quirk because 1.) 25 years (18 with the Sharingan) builds a lot of habits and 2.) he has never really needed to use his Quirk to its fullest extent to win battles. Todokashi would rather finish things quickly with the least amount of energy expended than create a huge iceberg to trap one kid.

Because he does not go all out (or focus so much on his ice for the majority of his life) like canon Todoroki regularly does, Todokashi /cannot/ use his Quirk to the extent canon Todoroki can. Todokashi is good at precision, strategy, and incorporating his Quirk into his fighting. This is not to say canon Todoroki is not good at any of these, but Todokashi really only focuses on using his Quirk as a tool in addition to what he can already do. Canon Todoroki completely eclipses him in power. A good comparison between the two would be that Todokashi uses his Quirk like brass knuckles: it makes him hit harder but only if he knows how to hit someone. Canon Todoroki uses his Quirk like a gun: you can beat someone on the head with it, but it performs best when you stand back and aim.

I want to make the joke that Todokashi brings a knife to a

gunfight and wins with his fists, but I'm afraid my editor will smite me. Too late lol.

Next update on Friday! Get ready for hero training, minor characters in the manga suddenly brought to the limelight, and paperwork. Lots and lots of paperwork. Rest in Peace.

Hero Training

Chapter Notes

Todokashi in work out gear

Todokashi from Midoriya's Hero Analysis

Todokashi in casual, fashionable wear

9:33pm

Three Tall Boys (and two short ones)

Satou Rikidou: who else is HYPE for monday!

Kouda Kouji: (͡° ͜ʖ ͡°) 人 (͡° ͜ʖ ͡°)

Satou Rikidou: kouji,,, my dearest friend,,,

Satou Rikidou: we need to talk abt ur emojis

Tokoyami Fumikage: It's for the good of this group chat

Shouji Mezou: I like them.

Satou Rikidou: shoubro,,, pls

Tokoyami Fumikage: For the love of everything sacred

Kouda Kouji: (͡° ͜ʖ ͡°) / ͡° ͜ʖ ͡° .

Satou Rikidou: im dying here

Tokoyami Fumikage: Release me from this mortal coil

Shouji Mezou: Are you guys ready for field training?

Satou Rikidou: fuck ya dude

Satou Rikidou: who did u choose? u had 50 offers right?

Shouji Mezou: Forty-three. Fumikage beat me handedly.

Tokoyami Fumikage: Only a few were from underground agencies

Satou Rikidou: oh yeah, u and todobro want to do underground stuff

Kouda Kouji: Virilight & remote search + rescue!

Satou Rikidou: ohhhh nice

Kouda Kouji: (〜ヾ〇)

Tokoyami Fumikage: Cease and desist

Shouji Mezou: I was hoping Gang Orca would send me an offer, but I believe his office sent an invitation to Bakugou. I am going to be training at Tenrescue Hero Office. Tokoyami accepted an invitation from Near Knight Agency.

Satou Rikidou: i was surprised Beet Down wanted interns. Shouda from 1b and i r going there

Todoroki Shouto: im training with Kesagiriman for underground work and intelligence gathering

Shouji Mezou: Did you not take up Edgeshot's offer?

Todoroki Shouto: i would be stuck with an intern. Kesagiriman is in the top one hundred and still is interested in working with me directly.

Shouji Mezou: He also works with Nighteye. They were responsible for the arrests of the Sixth Wave Gang after the Silver Horns kidnapping a year ago.

Kouda Kouji: good choice (〇ヾ〇)=b

Tokoyami Fumikage: Kouda, I swear to God

Todoroki Shouto: brb I have to drop off my revised costume design

Shouji Mezou: Thank you for reminding me.

Satou Rikidou: wait that was today

Kouda Kouji: lol rip

Tokoyami Fumikage: Do you need to use my markers? I think I left them at your house the last time we hung out

Satou Rikidou: 1. all ur markers r grey and black

Tokoyai Fumikage: It would be an improvement to whatever you wear

Kouda Kouji: gottem

Satou Rikidou: 2. u sat on top of my fridge so I couldn't get to u and ate the rest of the apple pie in front of me

Shouji Mezou: Fumikage... what the fuck?

Kouda Kouji: lmaoooo

-

Todoroki drops his costume design off at the Support Department's main lab five minutes after the deadline. The only student still in the lab waves him over when he opens the door.

“Todoroki Shouto! Congratulations on your win in the Sports Festival. Have you ever thought about incorporating tech in your regular arsenal? Some people say you only need a Quirk to be a pro-hero, but just look at this Supreme Capture Net Taser!”

The student pulls a bulky machine out of a pile and drops it on a table covered with hero costume designs. It looks one hastily applied roll of duck tape away from being a homemade potato gun.

The girl's hands slap down on either side of the gun and she leans forward into Todoroki's space. “So what do you say?” She wiggles her eyebrows.

Oh, this is the support girl from the Sports Festival. The one who basically put on a presentation of her gadgets while fighting Kirishima.

Todoroki ignores the sales pitch and passes over his concept sketches.

His first design had little in the way of Quirk enhancement technology. He had concentrated on mobility and protection, with a Kevlar lined long sleeve shirt and pants similar to ones used by motorcyclists to prevent road burn. On top, he wore a jacket of modern plate mail with two sheathes built into the sides for his Ka-Bars.

This new design fits a temperature regulator inside of the plate mail and adds spikes to the underside of his boots to prevent slips on ice. His new mask is flame resistant, as are his gloves. Midoriya had a point about Todoroki's dependence on his martial abilities rather than his Quirk.

The support student is easily distracted with the idea of designing a new creation and Todoroki slips out of the room before she notices.

-

Akaguro sits in a surprisingly clean booth in the back corner of the bar and cleans his knives. The repetition is nice, keeps his hands busy, lets him think, makes him look dangerous.

That last one is a very useful trait for the location he's in. Villains don't gather together for a reason. Yakuza and gangs are different. They are more like businesses than a loose collection of amoral people. It's nice and orderly, someone reports to someone else and it goes all the way up to a boss who is either the brains or the brawn behind the whole operation.

The League isn't like that. Akaguro would compare it to the series of meetings he had in his brief stint of vigilantism, but even those get-togethers in dark alleyways and rubbish dumps were more put together than this. They had different methods, sure, but most everyone agreed on the two major reasons to work outside the law:

there was evil out there and the heroes weren't able to, or couldn't, do enough.

Akaguro liked to tack on that the legislation governing Quirk use was bullshit too, but Knuckleduster was a fucking stickler. Sure the man didn't hesitate to interrogate civilians in the street, but start ranting about the establishment and he shut down.

He shakes the can of WD-40 and sprays it over the rust spotted blade of one of his pocketknives. The towel catches most of the aerosol, but Akaguro can feel Kurogiri's yellow eyes glaring at him. The man has a strange devotion to this dump. Akaguro would say he respects it, but all the infighting he has witnessed over the past week has soured his mood.

His sword hisses as it slides out of its sheath. He sets in in front of him, and pulls out another damp washcloth. It doesn't beat a good soak in the sink, but it's enough in this shit hole. One of Shigaraki's hang-ons twitches as the noise and turns to growl at Akaguro. He replies with a sneer that he knows looks distorted around his sawed-off nose.

There are moving pieces to any bureaucratic structure, from office work to heroes to villains. A lot of the gangs Akaguro has taken down (and worked alongside of) operate in tiers. There's the shit tier, where the recent recruits fall in, then higher levels with greater freedoms based on how resourceful someone is. The boss rules with an iron fist and delegates tasks to the tiers below him and everything falls into place.

Heroes are similar. Track record and experience increases the number of your assignments, and that exposure increases your pay and popularity. Then you start an agency and take responsibility for all the crime busts your subordinates do until they go and create their own office. Rinse and repeat. Akaguro fucking despises it but that's how it be sometimes.

Here, there is the obvious leader of All for One, the man constantly watching through the static of the television. Akaguro paid dearly for that name and even if he is never going to say it aloud, he will at least never have to call the man 'Sensei.'

He knows All for One is practically overflowing with power. He has his fingers in so many pies and his money in even more organizations. The man is steeped into the very fibers of Japan and attempting to pull him up would rip up the entire country. But he teeters on the borders of incompetent, cruel, and downright stupid when it comes to his 'apprentice.'

Shigaraki is a piece of work, and All for One lets him run wild. He has flashes of ideas every once in a while. One was recruiting Akaguro, though he never asked for a follow up plan after crippling Endeavor. Akaguro doesn't assume he needs one; after Endeavor's *legacy* is reduced to ashes the man will fall too. He will rage and stop for nothing in pursuit of revenge and that will make him clumsy.

Akaguro is smart. He has already decided who will kill him, and that hot-headed son of a bitch isn't it. Endeavor is good, but he loses his temper and gets sloppy and Akaguro can *feel* his knife leaving his hand and embedding itself into the man's eye.

Kurogiri's yellow eyes bore holes into the back of his head and Akaguro just lets his lips curl. He wonders if All for One will realize someday that it's more trouble than it's worth, keeping Shigaraki around. He needs a full time babysitter to prevent him from disintegrating anyone. Hell, he almost attacked Akaguro for laughing at his life goals.

'Destroying everything he doesn't like.' What a temper-tantrum throwing child, screaming because the world doesn't give him exactly what he wants. Akaguro almost pulled a knife out right then and

there. He doesn't deal with people chasing bloodlust without conviction. He has no time for evil bullshit like that.

He stuck around though, suffered through this hellhole of fucked up chains of command. He watched Shigaraki throw fits and Kurogiri clean up his messes and Giran swindle money out of part-time villains and turn the goons on each other for fun. He has sat and stared at the static of the television All for One regards this trash pit from. As soon as Akaguro get's what he wants, he is going to murder everyone he has met here.

All he needs is a good distraction that will bring the heroes, and their trainees, running. Then he can poach Endeavor's legacy and maybe the man himself if he gets lucky. If not, there are other failed heroes only in the job for money and glory. Akaguro has duties to fulfill and a message to spread.

After all, it wouldn't do for him to stop his quest when he's just started. The name 'Hero Killer' is just starting to spread and give the false saviors reason to change their ways before it is too late.

-

Mandarea is a ward that sits right on the edge of Kawasaki. It's populous and cramped, but the majority of residents are well off. The crime rate is low and what illegal activity does occur is rarely fatal for any involved. Robbery, extortion, and embezzlement are the three most popular crimes.

The crime rate has sunk even further over the past seventeen years with the establishment of the Kesagiriman Agency. It is named after the number seventy-six rank hero known for his Quirk 'Hair Blades' and analytical abilities. Along with the Genius Office, the Kesagiriman Agency was responsible for the dissolution of seventeen trafficking

rings, twelve minor gangs, and three established syndicates. Some of their most popular feats include a drug bust that practically eradicated a narcotic from Japan, the resolution to a four-day hostage crisis, and a raid against the infamous Sixth Wave Gang's kidnapping of pro-hero intern Silver Horns.

Todoroki's field training begins early Monday morning. He finds himself in the station with a case containing his hero costume in one hand and a cheap cardboard cup with two espresso shots in the other. Tokoyami has somehow wedged himself against Todoroki's left side in response to the cold morning air. Satou fortunately is too focused on the prospect of training to say anything and Shouji and Kouda only tried to hide their grins.

When Hagakure tries to comment on it, Tokoyami ignores her. Todoroki ignores both of them, concentrating on sneaking sips of his coffee around his mask without anyone noticing. It has nothing on the double brewed sludge Kurenai used to make, which was so thick you could chew it, but it is something.

Aizawa stands in front of their group, pretending that he is not worried for them. "You've got your costumes, right?" He asks to a chorus of affirmations and proceeds to lecture Ashido on her grammar.

Todoroki finds it hilarious that most in the class are still terrified of Aizawa. It is probably because he has been in a similar situation before, but Todoroki knows concern disguised as annoyance when he sees it.

He boards the train from Musutafu to Mandarea accompanied by Midoriya, Tsuyu, Mina, and Tokoyami. He has the second shortest journey, with a forty minute ride compared to Mina's thirty minute one. He salutes to Tokoyami as they arrive at the Mandarea station, wishing him luck on the rest of his five-hour trek. Tokoyami solemnly nods as he accepts Todoroki's condolences.

The platform at Mandarea is large, but not as crowded as Musutafu's was. Todoroki throws out the cardboard cup and pulls out his phone to find a map to Kesagiriman's agency.

"Sorry, are you Todoroki Shouto?" Someone in front of him says.

Todoroki feels the eyes of a few passersby land on him. "Nope," he replies. He holds his phone up and slowly turns to the left, trying to determine where the route to his starts. He has started walking in one direction before only to find out the GPS calculated a path based off its assumption that he was on another side of the road.

"Are you sure?" The same voice asks.

Todoroki looks up. A girl with short hair stands in front of him. She has a round face, a faint blush of anxiety coloring her features, and she is dressed in the U.A. uniform.

"I'm Yuyu," she says. It sounds more like a question than a fact. "I'm a second year in the support class at U.A. Kesagiriman sent me to pick you up."

Oh, he thinks he recognizes her. She is friends with Hado Nejire and Amijiki Tamaki.

Todoroki tabs out of his GPS app and switches to read a delightful series about a scientist named Kirk he found online. It's not as gratifying as pulling Icha Icha out of his pocket and watching people's faces freeze, but it is an excellent way to deflect.

And it's an excellent way to obscure the fourth of his face still visible. Yuyu is a friend of the big three at U.A., but her other alias might result in trouble if she figures out who he is later.

Yuyu fortunately only makes a sound in the back of her throat at the presence of his phone and the illicit material on it. She turns on her heel and starts leading him to Kesagiriman's office. On the way, she describes her position as an intern and what he will be expected to do for hero training.

"So most of what you are going to be working on is paperwork. It's not a glorious job," Yuyu reaches a hand into her pocket and pulls out a key card to the side door of the agency. "We use this door usually. We don't get media coming around a lot, but it's better safe than sorry. They tend to gather in the waiting room, so this way we can avoid them."

She slaps the card against a scanner and pulls the door open in one movement. "What was I saying?"

"Paperwork," Todoroki prompts her and follows her inside. A cold blast of air conditioning hits him. The inside of the building is lit with fluorescent lights that wash out Yuyu's hair into an even lighter blue. The walls are a typical beige and the hall branches out into conference rooms and offices with metal plaques by the doors. There's a bullpen up ahead with cubicles and computers and it is almost surreal to realize that some of the figures hunched over desks have saved lives with their own two hands.

"Yeah, paperwork." Yuyu makes a face. "We had a couple trainees last year from Isamu and Ketsubutsu High that didn't like it. They made the mistake of complaining about it loudly in front of Kesagiriman."

She jabs the up button on the elevator and rocks on her feet while it

creaks towards their floor. “They didn’t last too long. First impressions are very important, and they managed to mess that up. I don’t think they left the surveillance room their entire training week.”

The elevator doors ding and Yuyu steps through. As he follows, she turns to regard him. It’s still a shy look, but his infrequent nods and relatively attentive listening has seemed to bolster her.

“Congratulations on your Sports Festival win by the way. You had some pretty cool strategies, especially against that yelling kid.”

Todoroki cracks a smile at this. “Thanks,” he replies. They get off at the top floor and Yuyu drops him off in front of Kesagiriman’s office. She knocks.

“I’ll be waiting here,” she says. “He is probably just going to tell you about what you are going to be doing then send you down to either the archives or the bullpen to talk to someone.”

As if on cue, a gruff voice calls through the door. “Come in.”

Todoroki steps into the room. The view is fantastic, if slightly marred by the presence of so many filing cabinets. All the furniture in the room looks like it is from Ikea and the shelves lining the walls are hastily assembled and uneven in places. In the very middle is a desk covered in paperwork, behind which sits a man in a suit made of fur. The helmet of his hero costume is off, displaying a man whose only distinctive feature is a full beard.

“I assume you are Todoroki?” Kesagiriman asks. At Todoroki’s confirmation, he continues. “It is a pleasure to meet you. In case are not already familiar with the duties of those working in our office, allow me to fill you in.”

It is nothing Todoroki does not already know. Kesagiriman informs him that he will be going through filed reports of homicides and putting aside those that are gang related. Tomorrow he will start scanning the files and tagging them with location, gangs involved, and quirks used. The rest of the week, he will review the laws governing heroes before going on patrol with Kesagiriman.

“If you want to practice hand to hand combat or control of your quirk, Yuyu should be available.” Kesagiriman pulls a sheet of paper out from under a stack of manila folders and scans over it. “I guess that is everything. You may head out if you do not have any questions.”

Their conversation had taken longer than Yuyu had clearly expected, as at some point during her wait she went to retrieve her phone. When she sees him leave the office, she places the palm of her hand onto her skirt and gives it a small tug. It morphs until there is a pocket cut into the seam of one of the pleats. She sticks her phone in. “Where to?” She asks.

“Archives.”

Yuyu offers her sympathies as she takes him to the basement of the building. Todoroki stares in horror at the amount of shelves. The files have overflowed into sloppily stacked boxes of colored cardboard. Fluorescent lights flicker and Todoroki can taste the stale air on his tongue.

“Good luck,” Yuyu offers with pity.

-

Todoroki wakes up with sound trapped in his throat. He fumbles for a bit, reaches for a knife that isn't there and ends up with his phone in

his hands. His hands shake as he turns the flashlight on and scans the room he is in.

It takes a terrifying second to sink in. He's in one of the empty rooms at Kesagiriman's agency. Futons are laid against the floor, thankfully empty of any occupants, and the small window shows the first light of dawn casting the city into a hazy blue.

Yuyu lead him here yesterday, told him this room and the two on either side of it were used by sidekicks who missed the last train or needed to crash after pulling the short straw of night patrol. Trainees were expected to stay at their agencies for the whole week, so Todoroki ended up here.

5:43am his phone reads. Five hours of sleep. Todoroki fishes through his backpack and pulls out a Ziploc of ibuprofen. He picks out three and dry swallows, wincing as the headache building behind his eyes beats against the inside of his skull.

He grabs his computer and opens it. His third day of training starts in about two hours, and damn he's glad he no longer has to spend hours sitting in the archives reading until words blur together.

The plus side, he thinks as he pulls up the code for the chat site update, is that he has access to a lot of material he did not have previously. Hacking hero agencies is hard and Todoroki does not trust his abilities enough to do it and not get caught. Besides, given the bureaucratic hoops needed to jump through just to digitalize reports, the majority of agencies only scan the most important files.

He finishes the update in an hour and a half and reads over it twice, explaining it to himself under his breath to catch mistakes. He opens the app on his computer under an admin account to send out a server-wide message that AntiBoard will be offline for an hour while the

update is installed.

Todoroki untangles himself from the blankets and stretches. The sun has just crested the horizon. He collects his spare uniform and a toothbrush and heads to the bathroom.

“You ready to start patrol?” Yuyu asks when she finds him in the break room later with a cup of burnt coffee in his hand. Todoroki widens his eye and looks over her shoulder. As she whips around to look at the door, he tugs his mask down to his chin and drains the cup.

“Thought I saw something,” he tells a very confused Yuyu when she turns back to stare at him. He tosses the Styrofoam cup away. “Am I reviewing patrol rule with Kesagiriman or you?”

“Me,” Yuyu replies. She still looks puzzled, but does not comment. “Kesagiriman wants to go out after dinner. There’s a new vigilante working at night in Hosu that we are investigating. I’ll brief you on them after lunch.”

He follows her to her cubicle and sits on a swivel chair that squeaks obnoxiously when he tries to adjust the height. Yuyu takes out her key card and puts it into a scanner built into the keyboard of her computer. She types in a series of numbers, then pushes the screen towards Todoroki.

“You have to read these three PDFs then take a short course online. There are videos, which are probably the most interesting things about this. All Might is in them, acting in a really terrible skit about hero etiquette.”

Yuyu taps on the upper right hand corner of the desktop. Her finger

leaves a smudge over a file titled, 'FOR HERO TRAINEE'. "On the last PDF is the link to the website. After the course, you have to take a test and score above an eighty percent. Then we can talk about the vigilante."

Todoroki's dismay must be apparent. Yuyu pats him on the back and grins, "Still thinking about becoming a hero?"

Yes. Every single fucking day he wonders if he should quit, if he could quit. There's a part of him that is screaming to drop out, to get his G.E.D. and go to university. To just leave and study and learn and learn and learn about everything he wants to. There is Norte Chico in the Peruvian littoral and the Baths of Antoninus in Carthage and obelisks in Axum and thanka restoration efforts in Bhutan. There are languages he wants to learn and glaciers he wants to see and so much history he could drown in it. He wants this more than anything in the world.

(He is not a hero, can never be a hero. Heroes save and Todoroki has blood on his hands and failures weighing down his soul. The title hero is reserved for men with hair like the sun and women wielding incredible strength and the strongest person Todoroki ever knew, the one who overcame any obstacle in his path and almost died multiple times to save those precious to him and stuck with Todoroki no matter how much he did not deserve it. It is like the worst, the cruelest, punch line in the world, to call Todoroki a hero.)

(Todoroki cannot be a hero, but he can sacrifice himself. He does it easily, only weighing the benefits of the death of his dreams against his contributions to the world. He is still lost, still reeling without purpose, but rejecting his personal wants is ingrained into his being.)

Todoroki gets a notification in the class group chat and everything promptly goes to hell.

He is in Hosu with Kesagiriman, walking through an outdoor festival, when his phone buzzes. Todoroki frowns and starts to reach for it. Iida and Yaoyorozu strictly enforce the ‘school-related messages only’ rule, and almost half of the class is muted because of this. It is rare to get a text in the chat unless the next day is the due date for a project.

Out of nowhere, a Noumu falls from the sky and lands on top of a bus. It raises its slack mouth to the sky and lets out a grating shriek. The bus has crumpled underneath its feet, roof dented to the ground. There is a flash of pale skin visible through the torn metal. Todoroki watches as it is quickly stained red.

His phone buzzes in his hands once, twice, three times. Then, the screaming starts.

“Get back!” Kesagiriman yells and grabs Todoroki by the shoulder. He pushes Todoroki back, shoves him into an alleyway and starts sprinting towards the Noumu. “Go to the train station and wait for me. Do not engage,” he calls over his shoulder.

Todoroki takes a step back. His phone vibrates in his fist. He creeps deeper into the alley and opens the chat, planning on heading towards the station after he finds out what the hell is happening.

-

18:23

Class 1-a Group Chat (School-Related Matters Only)

Midoriya has shared his location.

Yaoyorozu: Are you all right, Midoriya? I assume this message is a mistake.

Sero: @Midoriya, u good?

Tsuyu: @Midoriya, please respond.

Ojiro: That is Hosu, right?

Yaoyorozu: Is anyone nearby Midoriya? Can someone please check on him?

Shouji: I am in Aomori. Tsuyu or Todoroki, are you close to him?

Tsuyu: I'm in the sea of Japan rn

-

Todoroki taps on the map. It is a twenty-minute walk from where he is.

-

Todoroki: give me five minutes, I am on my way

Tokoyami: Bring a pro with you. I am calling Aizawa

-

Todoroki starts running.

Four minutes and thirty seconds later, he turns a corner to see a masked man raise a sword up over Iida's face. Fire flares over arm and Todoroki almost sends a pillar of flame towards the figure, but he stops. Nedzu's words echo in his head. He cannot face this man with his quirk unless his own life is in danger.

He starts sprinting instead, hand digging into one of the new additions to hero costume: a pouch full of throwing knives. Todoroki snags three between his fingers and sends them flying.

The man jumps back. He manages to dodge two and block the third and the shrill screech of metal against metal echoes off the walls of the alley. There's a pause in the action, and Todoroki uses it to survey the scene.

He arrived in time for Iida to escape death, but the boy has a slice under his eye. Blood is dripping across his face, cutting a line of red across his nose and spilling to the grime-covered concrete. Midoriya is deeper inside the alley, crouched and unmoving. By him is the pro-hero Native, slumped against the wall with a dark spot growing over the shirt of his costume.

The masked man is standing in front of Midoriya and Native. Todoroki debates attempting to grab them, but realizes it is impossible to rescue both without taking significant damage or risking Iida's life.

"Oh, I was looking for you," the man says.

Todoroki recognizes that voice. Found him, he thinks.

"What a coincidence, Hero Killer." He pulls out a Ka-Bar and spins it in his hand.

"I had assumed you would be with your disgrace of a father. Imagine my disappointment when I discovered you rejected his offer for another agency."

“Mm. Well if you are still searching for him, I assume he will be where the Noumu are.” Todoroki tries to calculate where Hero Killer will attack first. Maybe he could make the man back off with projectiles and reach Midoriya and Native then. He still won’t have a way to carry them.

Hero Killer laughs. “You don’t understand. I was looking for you, Todoroki Shouto. It is my duty to kill your father and rid the world of false heroism. With his *legacy* out of the way, he will easily fall to me.”

“That sounds very interesting, but I am going to have to decline. Midoriya, what is your blood type?”

The turnaround seems to startle Midoriya. He stutters out his answer. “O negative.”

“Wonderful. When the paralysis wears off I need you to grab Native and run to where the pros are fighting. Get one to help.” Todoroki’s visible eye curls up into a crescent. “Mr. Akaguro and I are going to have a discussion.”

“This is not your-”

Hero Killer’s voice cuts off Iida’s. “How do you know that?”

“Same place you learned about my purpose. Giran is a great source; too bad he likes to play both sides.”

“Stop!” Iida yells. “Why are you helping me? This is my fight! I inherited my brother’s name-”

“Iida,” Todoroki interrupts him. Out of the corner of his eye, Midoriya has started to move. “I really don’t fucking care about why you made this terrible decision, but now, three lives are at risk, including your own. If you idolize your brother this much, why don’t you try to be like him instead of acting on your emotions like a temperamental idiot.”

“Three lives,” Hero Killer laughs again and it is a dark thing. “Are you not expecting to die-”

He reels as Midoriya blitzes forward and slams a fist into his jaw. Hero Killer slashes blindly with his sword but misses as Midoriya darts over to pick up Native. He sprints towards Todoroki and deposits the pro behind them before taking up a fighting stance at Todoroki’s side.

“Midoriya, stick with the plan.” Todoroki is going to teach this kid how to follow a goddamn plan if they get out of this.

“I won’t leave you behind, Todoroki!” He sounds so much like Naruto that Todoroki does not know if he wants to bury him in the ground up to his head or cry.

“I wonder how much you can do against me, Todoroki Shouto. After the U.S.J., you must have gotten a primer on hero law.” Hero Killer cuts a circle in the air with his sword as he spins it in his hands. “There is no way you will survive this and save your friends without using your Quirk. But if you do use it and survive, you’ll face a police inquiry.”

Todoroki feels a smile spread across his face. He shifts his knife so the blade faces down against his forearm. Adrenaline is rushing through his veins in preparation for a fight. He pulls the Ka-Bar up in front of

his chest, letting his other fist hover by his stomach as a guard. “Is that so,” and his grin is audible in his voice. “I’ll just have to see for myself.”

Fight!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“With our Quirks, you should provide mid-range support while I attack close range. You can also use your ice to protect Iida and Native until the pros-”

“Midoriya,” Todoroki interrupts. “I believe you misunderstand. I am going to cover your retreat with Native and you are immediately going to bring a pro-hero back with you. Then we will take Iida together, and let the pro handle it.”

“Todoroki! Is what he said about using your Quirk true?” Iida asks from his position on the ground. Todoroki nods and flips his knife through his fingers, plotting his next move.

“I’m not leaving you!” Midoriya yells. “I’m not going to let you get killed!”

Todoroki suppresses the urge to drag his hand down his face in resigned annoyance. “Fine,” he says. “Just stay here-”

A brace of throwing knives flies through the air, headed straight for Midoriya. Todoroki does not even think before he acts. He grabs the other boy by the shoulder and pulls him down and forward until he is shielded by Todoroki’s body. His knife flashes in the dim alley light and the sound of metal on metal echoes as Todoroki cuts the blades out of the air.

“Time’s up.” Hero Killer points his sword at Todoroki. “Are you ready

to die?”

“Not especially,” Todoroki replies. He shoves Midoriya towards Iida and Native. As he paces towards Hero Killer, he watches the other man’s lips curl into a feral smile.

There is a second of silence. Then Hero Killer attacks.

Midoriya almost gets up and throws himself towards the man, but Todoroki swipes his foot out from under him. “Stay. Here.” He grits out and steps forward.

Hero Killer is fast. He charges towards Todoroki and stays just out of his range, slashing at him in tight movements that hiss just over Todoroki’s skin. Todoroki dodges the first diagonal cut, and ducks as Hero Killer changes the momentum of the blade to backhand slice at him. He needs the push the man further into the alley, get him away from Midoriya and the other two.

Todoroki follows his ducking movement under Hero Killer’s blade and into his guard, aiming his Ka-Bar at the tendons in the man’s arm. Hero Killer lunges back and pulls a second blade out of his side holster. Todoroki grabs the man’s wrist and his knife skitters off Hero Killer’s chest plate. He is forced to let go, as Hero Killer kicks out towards his legs.

They pause and stare at each other. Hero Killer twitches forward and sneers as Todoroki’s knife comes up to block a blow that never comes. Todoroki’s teeth grind together.

Todoroki races forward this time, hoping but not at all expecting Midoriya to use the opening to run. Hero Killer slashes towards his left, aiming for Todoroki blind spot. He is able to parry but winces at

the force behind the man's blade. Hero Killer does not allow him to dip inside his guard again, following the slash with a stab forward that Todoroki deflects with the back of his hand. It *stings*. He blocks two more attacks aimed at his left shoulder and left hip respectively, and is forced to contort his body to miss Hero Killer's other blade.

This time, Todoroki has to slide to the side as Hero Killer jumps at him. He backs up, weaving through a succession of slashes. Just before his back hits the wall of the alley, Todoroki drops and rolls to the right. Hero Killer's sword rings against the concrete and Todoroki can see chips of metal flying off the blade from the impact.

Hero Killer rebounds with his sword and his left side is completely open, hand with the knife in it only pulling up slightly as he tries to orient himself. Todoroki springs forward to take advantage of the opening. He tears through Hero Killer's sleeve and into his skin. While Todoroki cannot see how deep his blades slides into the man's arm, he knows the feeling from experience. The slight resistance of the superficial extensor digitorum catches his blade and he pulls.

The man does not scream as his knife clatters to the ground. Instead, he pivots towards Todoroki and uses the momentum of the movement to swing his blade with a wordless yell of fury. Todoroki hastily blocks with his knife, but the force of the swing knocks his guard down and the sword slashes deep into the meat of his shoulder.

Todoroki grunts and pushes against the searing pain, throwing the blade off him and ducking into another roll. He feels grit on the alley catch on the tear of his costume and smear into the wound. It burns as he twists onto his feet.

"Not bad," Hero Killer pants. His arm hangs uselessly down by his thigh. A steady stream of blood is bubbling up from the wound and running over the back of his hand. Despite this, the man's manic smile has not faded.

“I’ve had some practice.” Todoroki races forward again before Hero Killer can try to lick his blood off the blade. He feints to the right and slides around a swipe. Out of the corner of his working eye, Todoroki can see the wall he was previously backed against and he makes a split second decision.

Hero Killer redirects his attack towards Todoroki’s legs just as Todoroki leaps off the ground, kicks off the wall, and swings his left foot into Hero Killer’s face. The thud of his iron toed boot against Hero Killer’s cheek echoes through the alley.

The man rears back and blindly swings out his sword. The blade skims over Todoroki’s arm, but the Kevlar of his costume prevents the weak attack from slicing through. Still, the force behind it, while not comparable to the swing that cut through Todoroki’s muscle, smarts. Todoroki would not be surprised if it bruised his arm to the bone.

Todoroki lands and slams a fist into Hero Killer’s unprotected gut. He gets overconfident as the man retches and wheels behind him to cut at his legs. Hero Killer lashes out at his face. Todoroki watches the blade whisper through the air towards his working eye.

He manages to catch the sword against his open palm and the blunt side of his Ka-Bar. It bites through the flesh of his hand and Todoroki wheezes as it hits bone. He watches the heat of his breath fog against the blade almost in slow motion. His hand *burns*.

Hero Killer puts more weight against his sword and Todoroki fights back, trying to relieve the pressure against his hand. His arms shake with the effort. The man’s tongue rolls out of his mouth and he dips into Todoroki’s space, trying to catch some of the blood pooling and dripping down the length of his blade.

Todoroki surges up and slams his forehead against the man's cut-off nose. He grits his teeth and bites back a scream as he pulls his lacerated hand off the man's blade. He lets his sleeve fall over his palm as a barrier before wrapping his numb fingers around the outside of Hero Killer's wrist.

Sparks kick up as his knife slides down Hero Killer's sword, stopping just before the hilt. Todoroki's shoulder throbs with his pulse. His head is ringing slightly and his hand scratches against the inside of his costume. The pain is making sweat bead up against his forehead.

His finger's are like iron bands against Hero Killer's wrist. Using his grip and the leverage of his knife against the man's sword hilt, he twists the man's hand inwards. Hero Killer leans with the movement, trying to keep a hand on his blade, but Todoroki wrenches his arm down and pulls.

The man lets go without warning and slams his boot right under Todoroki's armpit where there is an opening in his plate armor. Todoroki's breath rushes out of him but he manages to toss the sword out of the way, unfortunately losing his knife in the process. He tries to stagger up onto his feet, but is met with another hard kick in the same place. This time, he feels something give.

Todoroki catches the leg before it can hit him a third time and slams an elbow against the outside of Hero Killer's knee. The man grunts and stumbles back. Todoroki gets his feet underneath him and pull his other knife from his side holster before diving back in.

Hero Killer has the same idea. They meet in the middle, a flurry of shrieking metal and sparks. Todoroki can feel his movements getting clumsy with pain and blood loss, but he powers through. Hero Killer is limping now. Todoroki must have done some damage to the man's knee, because his speed has decreased significantly.

Todoroki catches a wild strike aimed towards his left with his undamaged forearm. He immediately spins in and pins the man's arm against his side, transferring his blade between his palms as he does. He smashes the butt of his knife against Hero Killer's throat.

They have moved to the opposite side of the alley, with Todoroki cornering Hero Killer now. The force of his hit pitches the man backwards so he slumps against the wall. Todoroki wastes no time in dropping the arm he has pinned and pulling his undamaged hand into a fist.

The crack of Hero Killer's head against the stone of the building behind him fills Todoroki with a rush of vicious satisfaction. He punches the man in the face a second time, a third, and feels something in his fingers break.

When he steps back, Hero Killer collapses against the ground. His eyes have rolled up until just the whites are showing and he lies like a marionette with the strings cut. He has been knocked out.

Sound rushes back in and with it, the sound of his name. Todoroki turns to the voice and feels something *tear*.

Shit, he thinks. That's not good.

He tenses and resists the urge to curl up on himself. Instead, he stays perfectly still, only twisting his head to look for who called him.

It's Midoriya. Iida and Native have been moved out of the alley into the street. Midoriya's phone is out and the ended call screen flashes in the dim light. He must have gotten in contact with a pro while ensuring Todoroki had backup.

“Todoroki! Are you okay? You’re bleeding,” Midoriya is panicked. He runs closer, trying to determine how injured Todoroki is.

“I’m fine,” Todoroki replies and analyzes the way his ribs shift under his skin when he talks. A cough rises up without warning and Todoroki traps it behind his teeth. “We need to tie him up. And-”

It’s getting hard to think. He feels something wet flowing down his right arm and catching on his numb fingers. Did the blade hit his humeral circumflex? Maybe the deltoid branch of his thoracoacromial? The sound of blood hitting the gritty floor of the alley fades in and out of his hearing.

Todoroki is intimately familiar with all types of exhaustion and injury. He knows blood loss like the back of his hand. Black spots have started blinking in his vision; he has ten minutes at most left of relative coherency before he passes out.

“We need to get an ambulance,” Midoriya’s eyes are incredibly wide. His hands hover by Todoroki, unsure whether to touch him or not. Todoroki would prefer if he didn’t. He might jar something and Todoroki’s relative stability will come crashing down.

He focuses on breathing shallowly. He maneuvers his lacerated left hand to cup the wound on his right shoulder. Multi-tasking, he thinks as he applies pressure. It’s not a very funny joke.

“Is,” The flickering light of loading dock in the alleyway is distracting Todoroki. “Are Native and Iida stable?”

Poor Midoriya probably has no training in first aid. He stutters out what he saw was wrong, and Todoroki nods. “Well, Iida has not fainted yet so we know his subclavian artery was not nicked. That’s

good. He probably won't bleed out then."

That was not the best thing to say to an anxious Midoriya. Todoroki pushes aside faint feelings of guilt as the world starts to lean to the side. He prompts Midoriya for rope and hobbles to lean against the wall. He has to direct Midoriya through a couple knots, but they have Hero Killer restrained eventually.

"I called Gran Torino," Midoriya says as he pulls Hero Killer to the mouth of the alley. "He's on his way. Are you sure you're, um." Midoriya makes a gesture that Todoroki assumes means something along the lines of 'not going to die on me'.

Todoroki nods. His vision spins unpleasantly.

The fight lasted under two minutes. The four of them and a still unconscious Hero Killer wait in the front of the alley for the heroes to come. Todoroki shifts to press his bleeding palm against his broken ribs and chokes down coughs. It is getting progressively harder to breath evenly as his vision greys at the edges.

He really does not want to collapse on Midoriya or Iida. Todoroki has already done that to one group of children after a fight. He wants no repeats of his time in Wave.

Iida regains mobility after another minute and stews in silence. Midoriya is fluttering around, making sure both Iida and Native have pressure applied to their wounds. Todoroki tries to open his phone to reply to the chat but cannot will his fingers to tap out his password in the right order.

Just as he is giving up, the pro-heroes arrive.

An elderly man rockets across the street and slams a boot into Midoriya's face, lecturing him about staying in his train seat. "Goddamn kid, it was lucky I actually brought my phone with me. What the hell were you thinking?"

"Gran Torino!" Midoriya glances over at Todoroki, who is doing his best not to sway, and the other two injured members of their party. "Did you bring anyone else? They are really hurt and I'm not sure if we can carry them."

Iida protests loudly and demonstrates his ability to walk by standing and almost falling over.

"Yeah, I brought someone with me. Enji, get over here," Gran Torino calls over his shoulder.

Ah, Todoroki thinks. This is just his day, isn't it.

Endeavor strides out of an alley across the street with a pack of sidekicks following him. Flames are twisting around his mouth and the ever-present mix of a grimace and a sneer is plastered on his face. He pauses when he sees Hero Killer and his eyes flick up to look at their group. The sidekicks behind him notice too, and start talking amongst themselves.

Endeavor's eyes pass over Native before lingering on Iida and Midoriya. Finally he seems to notice Todoroki leaning against the alley wall. Shock crosses his features and he stares.

Todoroki stares back. He was not expecting the man's presence or his reaction.

“Shouto,” Endeavor greets him. He looks confused with a mixture of something else that Todoroki has never seen on his face.

“Endeavor,” Todoroki replies. Then he doubles over as a cough finally escapes him. Something warm paints the back of his throat.

Todoroki pulls up the bottom of his mask and faces away from the group to spit out a mouthful of blood.

“Todoroki! Are you-” Midoriya starts running over and is promptly grabbed off the ground by a Noumu. He yells in pain and Todoroki’s brain kicks into overdrive as the dredges of adrenaline still left in his system dull his pain for a second wind.

He ignores the pull of his shoulder, the open flesh of his palm, the bruising wrapping around his arm, the ribs creaking under his skin, the blood in his mouth. Todoroki starts to sprint forward, only to be passed by Hero Killer.

The man licks the Noumu’s blood off of one of Endeavor’s sidekick’s face and jumps at the creature as it starts to fall from the sky. He sticks a knife into its exposed brain and carves a bloody stripe through it, before pulling Midoriya safely to the ground.

When Hero Killer turns to look back at their group, he is wild eyed with manic intent is rolling off of him in waves.

Todoroki, who has fought the likes of Orochimaru, does not flinch. He holds his Ka-Bar in his fist and pushes down his fear and prepares for an attack. The pain blooming in his side stabs at him, a thousand spears digging between his ribs and ripping his insides into shreds.

He stands without swaying and faces the man without a single thought of fleeing in his mind.

(Todoroki does not realize this at the time, but Endeavor is behind him. Todoroki's ears are pounding with blood and his focus is only on the killer in front of him. He has a knife in his hands and experience against unkillable men and demons of pure power and people more comparable to gods than actual humans. Todoroki stands without the urge to—without the need to—check behind him for support. He faces Hero Killer and does not notice his father preparing to rush in too.)

But Hero Killer stops. He has passed out after stating his ultimatum, defiantly statuesque despite his multiple injuries.

Midoriya scrambles away from him and every person in that empty side street stares at the self-proclaimed purifier of the hero industry.

And Todoroki feels the last traces of epinephrine and will power leave his system. He is able to sigh once in relief before he is wracked with another coughing fit, this time so strong he does not have time to pull his mask up. The cloth covering his face catches blood and it drips thickly down his chin. Todoroki hunches in on himself and chokes.

When he finally keels over, he is caught before he hits the ground. The last thing he sees before he passes out from blood loss is a face inexplicably filled with worry.

-

Todoroki wakes up the same way a man accidentally slips off a high place. There is a second of confusion before realization sets in and he

can only panic.

He does not make a noise. Even if he had not trained himself against that habit, he still would not be able to in this moment. There is a heavy weight on his lungs keeping them from contracting and letting any air make its way up his throat.

“Oh, Todoroki! You’re awake.”

Todoroki’s eyes snap open at the words. The light blinds him and he reels before he realizes where he is.

It is not the very worst place to be, but it is easily in the top ten. Todoroki despises hospitals with every fiber of his being.

He makes a token effort to stand up but finds he cannot even lift his head. There is a feeling of dissonance between his limbs that Todoroki recognizes as drug-induced. He can just blink and twitch pathetically. He chooses not to do that latter, as he has an image to maintain.

Midoriya and Iida are sitting in front of him. Midoriya is dressed in his work out clothes while Iida is in a hospital gown. One of Iida’s arms is in a sling and a bandage is peeking out from underneath his gown. Midoriya has a patch stuck to his shoulder with medical tape.

Todoroki’s eyes roll over to the side of his bed. A heart monitor sits next to an IV bag full of blood. On his other side are two IV bags Todoroki bets are full of saline and morphine. A dull whirring sound comes directly on his left, where a canister is attached to a tube that disappears under Todoroki’s shirt.

He starts to raise an eyebrow when he freezes. The numbness of his arms is hard to fight against, but he manages and does not even flinch when his movement tugs at his IV. His hand flops against his face. It is clammy against his exposed cheekbones.

The heart monitor kicks up a notch, his pulse fighting against the morphine in his system to push him into alarm. The bottom of his face is barely covered by the thin hospital blankets, but everything from the tip of his nose up is open to the air.

This is why he fucking hates hospitals. Patient confidentiality is guaranteed until it isn't because people either mess up or want to show the world what they discovered in someone's chart. Todoroki can withstand a lot, but loss of privacy is something he will never give up without a fight.

"Todoroki, are you alright?" Iida asks. "You should not be moving your arms like. What if you pulled out an IV?"

Todoroki just glares at him. He raises his other hand and points at a box of disposable masks. His fingers are almost too heavy to snap, but he manages. How many people saw?

"You want a mask?" Midoriya asks. Todoroki snaps again.

"Okay, Todoroki." He hops off of the visitor chair and pulls one out of the box and brings it over to him. "Need any help putting it on?"

Todoroki manages to shake his head without dislodging his dull hand. He fumbles with the mask, taking longer than it should to hook a loop over one ear. The other one is faster, but Todoroki almost tears his IV out when he has trouble reaching across his face.

Midoriya tugs on Iida's arm and points at his phone. They turn away and Todoroki is grateful even as his teeth grit together and the back of his neck burns. He pulls his hand off the bottom of his face and is just able to adjust the mask so it comes down to his chin in the same move.

He is glad he was able to, as the door to the hospital room opens up at that moment and four people step through.

Todoroki can point out three. The first is Kesagiriman, whose mask is off and disappointed expression bared for the world to see. The second is Gran Torino, the pro-hero training Midoriya. The third is Tsuragame, the chief of police.

"Oh, the little wounded warriors are awake," Gran Torino greets them. "I've already chewed Midoriya out, as he didn't need surgery and could leave the hospital with a bandaid. Now it's your turn." He grins at Todoroki and Iida.

Todoroki's throat rasps as he tries to greet Kesagiriman.

"I would recommend for you to not move that much," Kesagiriman walks over to Todoroki's bedside. "I believe you had a traumatic pneumothorax and some internal bleeding on top of your surface level injuries. From what the nurses have told me, you have been in and out of surgery for the past day."

"Time," Todoroki croaks out. His hands itch for his phone.

"It is Thursday. If my watch is not wrong, it is almost four o'clock p.m."

Kesagiriman bends closer, until only Todoroki can hear his whispered words. “We will have a more in depth discussion about this tomorrow, as it can be construed from what the nurses have said that they will reduce your morphine levels then. You need to recognize that you have done something very troubling and irresponsible, especially with your record. I am not going to tell you I am proud of you for saving your friends, as the way you chose to save them risked your life and others. Are we clear?”

Todoroki has never been more thankful for having a raw throat, as his angry growl is now interchangeable with his normal tone. “Yes, sir.”

Gran Torino introduces the chief of police, who brings them up to date about Hero Killer’s condition.

“He is currently in treatment for his torn muscles, fractured cheekbone, internal bruising, sprained wrist, ACL tear, fractured larynx, concussion, and broken nose, woof.”

Todoroki watches the police chief repeat what Nedzu had told him about a week earlier. He frowns.

“Sorry,” he interrupts Tsuragame. His voice is barely audible and it scrapes against the top of his mouth. “My actions against Hero Killer were completely legal.”

“Todoroki-” Iida tries to stop him. The pro-heroes look slightly taken aback.

“Hero laws prohibit the use of Quirks in situations that are not strictly self-defense. If I had used my Quirk to intervene when Hero Killer was

about to kill my classmate, I would be able to be tried under those laws. However, the use of hand-to-hand combat has significantly less limitations.

“The Oguro v. Chubu ruling upheld the right of civilians with martial arts training to defend themselves or intervene if another human’s life is at risk. Though the ruling happened thirty years ago, the court has never rescinded the precedent set by Oguro, a judo instructor who stopped a homicide.

“None of the injuries sustained by Hero Killer were the result of the use of my Quirk. I would not be found guilty in court.”

The room is silent save for Todoroki’s rasping breaths. He might have overdone it, as his lungs felt like sandpaper in his chest, but he got his point across.

Todoroki is unreasonably glad for the thirteen-page assignment on Quirk and hero law Aizawa assigned him. It set his schedule back almost half a week, but he has a much stronger legal base now.

Tsuragame finally speaks up. “That may be the case, and we will investigate more into this later, but Iida and Midoriya still used their Quirks without a pro’s instruction. So we are left with two options.”

“We can release this information to the public, who will laud you three as heroes. But while Todoroki may escape punishment, the two of you,” Tsuragame’s drooping eyes look to Midoriya and Iida, “will have to be dealt with by the law.”

“Or,” Tsuragame continues, “we could keep this information to ourselves. While Hero Killer’s injuries do not reflect Endeavor’s methods of takedown, a vigilante recently active in Hosu is an

applicable suspect, woof. I believe Kesagiriman was in Hosu to investigate them in the first place.”

Kesagiriman nods. “The Black Ram, if our sources are correct. Victims report the use of a mind based Quirk and a bo staff. It is reasonable to assume they would attack Hero Killer.”

“And Endeavor can be given the accolades for capturing Hero Killer. The vigilante leaves victims for heroes to collect, so this will fit perfectly. Your actions will remain unknown to the public, but so will your accomplishments, woof.

“What do you say?” Tsuragame asks. He sticks his thumb out and his jowls curl up. “I’m an understanding man. So when it comes to a promising group of young people, I’d rather not pursue charges of this admittedly massive indiscretion, woof.”

Iida and Midoriya both stand to bow. Todoroki just nods. He is tired and the morphine drip has started again. It must be on a timer, he muses as he drifts off to the sounds of Iida apologizing.

-

> > WELCOME k1llj0y TO privchat/scourge_feed/

> > WELCOME dronehead TO privchat/scourge_feed/

> > WELCOME gayjackiechan TO privchat/scourge_feed/

> > WELCOME sharkfuckah TO privchat/scourge_feed/

> > WELCOME sadboizz TO privchat/scourge_feed/

> > WELCOME picassoaintshit TO privchat/scourge_feet/

> > WELCOME thotpatrol_honcho TO privchat/scourge_feed/

gayjackiechan

> ayy, private chat

sharkfuckah

> this update is great

> ip based login for priv chats?

sadboizz

> @sharkfuckah too many people use proxies, must be smth else.

k1llj0y

> Hero Killer arrested by pro-hero Endeavor in Hosu after takedown by vigilante Black Ram.

> Police still unsure whether Hero Killer was related to the appearance of the League in Hosu at the same time.

> Villains called 'Noumu' responsible for the deaths of 18 and injuries of 54. Appeared to use multiple Quirks.

gayjackiechan

> hoooooly shit

thotpatrol_3133

> news is only reporting on noumu, police must not have held press conference yet

gayjackiechan

> damn, im low key sad hero killer was arrested

sadboizz

> he killed people.

gayjackiechan

> yeah, but like

> I stan

sharkfuckah

> I'm not even gonna be surprised if u get arrested

k1llj0y

> Footage from nearby CCTV released by undisclosed sources.

> Only angle after arrest visible, but video shows Hero Killer taking down a Noumu and revealing his ideology.

> Kill_The_Hero_Stain.mov

gayjackiechan

> 'I must take back what it means to be a hero'

> wow, im here for this

sadboizz

> @sharkfuckah verification?

sharkfuckah

> on it

thotpatrol_4200

> I wasn't aware that Hero Killer was working with the League

gayjackiechan

> @thotpatrol_4200 uknoihad2 said reformers plant spotted Hero Killer at League hide out before we lost contact

k1llj0y

> I can confirm. Hero Killer was working with the League. I do not know if he and the LOV coordinated their attacks, but his presence at the base has been verified by multiple sources.

sharkfuckah

> @sadboizz video is real

gayjackiechan

> cant wait for someone to dub evanescence over this

k1llj0y,

> It goes without saying that, like the previous video on Hero Killer's ideology I posted, this clip is being traced and taken down.

sharkfuckah

> > cant wait for someone to dub evanescence over this

> underrated comment

dronehead

> Back from afk

> Herokiller_takedown.mov

gayjackiechan

> did Todoroki just take out hero killer

sharkfuckah

> wait didn't he kill a guy at USJ too?

thotpatrol_6969

> why isn't he using his quirk?

dronehead

> Thanks for the tip boss @rokudaime.hokage

Chapter End Notes

Alright! Time for more meta.

I read over my chapter notes for my last update and they were barely comprehensible even to me. I have the hazy memory of forgetting how to use my credit card while trying to buy tickets to Dumbfounded's concert. Thankfully, my beta reader was there to yell at me. Thank you Rose, both for steering me into the light of God and agreeing to arrive three hours early to the venue to get

front row spots.

So last chapter Kesagiriman and Yuyu were introduced. Kesagiriman appeared during the Eighth Precepts arc. All we know about him is his way slightly self-effacing way of speaking and one of the abilities of his Quirk. Yuyu is from three panels during Eri's tour of U.A. She's a friend of the Big Three and thinks first impressions are important. Everything else about her, from her hair color to her Quirk, is made up.

Alright, for the boys! None of their internships are mentioned in the manga or anime, so all the pro-heroes they trained with are ocs.

Kouda: Virilight, remote search and rescue hero who uses his Quirk to commune with plants

Shouji: Tenrescue, urban search and rescue pro who's Quirk 'Tenrec' gives him the characteristics of a tenrec, including echolocation

Tokoyami: Near Knight, underground hero who's Quirk allows her to gain power at sunrise or sunset

Satou: Beet Down, villain apprehension pro who eats beets to gain muscle mass but if she eats too much, she gets kidney stones

For this chapter, we have a fight scene and the beginning of the resolution of this arc. Does the name Oguro sound familiar? Quirk laws are very confusing and convoluted. Thankfully Aizawa assigned Todoroki a metric fuckton of essays on the laws. Did he intend Todoroki to use his new, very detailed, knowledge to bend the law in other ways? Absolutely not. But that's just how it be sometimes.

For the scene with Todoroki's mask: nobody removed his mask with malicious intent. Todoroki does not have the same reputation with hospitals here, for better or for worse. No one knew to give him a mask. No one also knows to board up the windows and put a guard on his room to make sure he doesn't escape. Also, about patient confidentiality: I've worked in hospitals. I've worked in /government/ hospitals. Everyone generally follows it, but sometimes things slip through. Todoroki certainly knows this. It only takes one person for a big secret to get out. All Might's case shows that somethings can be kept under wraps, so maybe HIPPA is a lot more secure in the future. We can only hope.

Next chapter: concerned adults, concerned friends, more

realizations, Hagakure, humor, and family.

Recovery

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Todoroki wakes up the next day to an empty room. Iida's bed is unmade. The sun is high in the sky. This is the most Todoroki has probably slept in a while, he realizes.

Last night, he was disturbed once after the talk with the chief of police when a nurse removed his IV and bag for the blood transfusion. Around dawn, a different woman came to adjust his morphine drip and remove his saline. Todoroki has bruises blooming over where the needles dug into his skin, matching the patches of purple gradually spreading down his arm. Remnants of Hero Killer's sword, he remembers.

When he is finally oriented enough to reach for his phone, he can only slap a palm on top of it. Todoroki looks over at the offending appendage. His hand that suffered a thick slash along its palm is encased with bandages. He props himself on an elbow to reach with his other arm instead. The splints on his index and middle fingers make it difficult, but Todoroki only almost drops it once.

He is scrolling through his chat site when Recovery Girl comes into the room. She is followed by a resident with short curly hair and wide-spaced eyes. His rectangular pupils swivel to look at Todoroki before he passes Recovery Girl a folder and leaves the room. Todoroki exits out of the app and lets his phone fall through his clumsy fingers onto his lap.

"Todoroki Shouto," Recovery Girl greets him.

Todoroki hums in acknowledgement. His body still feels pressed down

into the bed by the impossible weight of gravity, but it is starting to fade.

Along with the folder the resident gave her, Recovery Girl has a thick file Todoroki recognizes as his under one arm. Her other carries a cane that she is only barely leaning against. She takes a seat in the visitor's chair and pulls out his discharge summary from the OR.

"We are all very glad you are not dead." She says. Her eyes leave the rest for him to infer. He must have been injured enough for his teachers to worry for his life. Said teachers must also be very angry that he allowed himself to get this injured.

Recovery Girl reaches out to grab the side of his hospital shirt and pull it up. Todoroki shifts his arm to give her room. The tube he noticed earlier slots underneath his skin among a blotch of dark bruises.

"Your chest tube insertion is looking good," Recovery Girl says. "I was called to seal your lung puncture, as surgery would take almost eight weeks to recover from and we need you back in school."

She taps the whirring canister by his side. "Almost all the air and fluid has been drained from your chest cavity. The doctor should be able to remove it today, but do not expect to return to your agency."

Todoroki nods. He has a feeling if he was allowed to come back, Kesagiriman would lock him in the archives for the rest of the week.

Recovery Girl pulls back after she is done looking at the stitches around the insertion. "I was able to repair the tear to your deltoid. The doctors here took care of the metacarpal-deep laceration to your left hand and splinted the fractures to your index and middle fingers of your right hand. Your ribs have been set. I sped up the process to

the bony callous formation stage, so give it a few weeks before strenuous activity.”

She pulls out a set of x-rays to show him. The breaks in his ribs are circled with red and an arrow points towards the puncture. A mass of white had collected in his lungs at the time of the x-ray, blood cells and air he assumes. The fractures in his fingers are similarly highlighted with red, but Todoroki cannot see a visible break like the jagged spokes of his ribs.

“Your concussion and subperiosteal hematoma, the bone bruise on arm, will heal with time. Now, let’s move on to your other health issues.”

Recovery Girl shuffles the papers in her lap. She pulls a form out and lays it on the top of the stack. Todoroki can see the front of the page through the glow of the light. It is covered with clip art and the text is large.

“This is usually a form we give teenagers to fill out by themselves, but you are unable to hold a pen at the moment, so I will go over it with you.”

Todoroki looks at the door and prays for someone to barge in and interrupt them. No one does, because it is a cruel world.

“How many hours of sleep do you get a night on average, Todoroki?”

If there is a benevolent God, he does not have his eyes on this small hospital room.

Todoroki debates lying. “Seven,” he tries. Recovery Girl keeps her stern gaze trained on him. “Six?” It sounds more like a question.

She writes something down and moves on. “Has your appetite increased or decreased recently?”

“No,” he replies. He has always had a low appetite. There is a diet plan taped to his wall reminding him to eat three times a day. This has not changed over both his lives.

“Have you felt bad about yourself – or that you’re a failure or have let others down, in the past two weeks?”

It is going to be a long day.

One hour and a lecture on not smoking (he never told her he did, but she must have seen something in his expression), Recovery Girl is telling him about the risks of overwork.

“It is a real problem, especially here in Japan. At your age, the problems you can face are mainly mental health related. The amount of stress you are putting your mind and body under will contribute to anxiety, depression, and insomnia. As you age, and if you continue exhausting yourself, there is significant risk of an early death via heart failure and stroke.”

Todoroki is reminded of a very similar conversation he had with Tsunade a long time ago. That was back when his kids had just left his team and he had been thrust back into the regular mission rotation, still reeling from the loss. He had let his food plan... slip. Tsunade had pulled him from the active duty roster and had him training baby Anbu for months after that incident.

“We did a metabolic panel too, to check if you were at risk of malnourishment; these things usually go hand in hand. Everything was eerily perfect for your age and level of activity.” Recovery Girl shows him a loose sheet of paper. It is another clip art monstrosity, detailing how to lower stress levels. There are some additions: the bullet point for exercise has been crossed out with blue pen and precise kanji for ‘More meditation based exercises’ written above it. Diet analysis has also been removed.

“And while I have your attention,” Recovery Girl says, “are there any questions you have for me about sexuality, sexual intercourse, or sexually transmitted diseases? There are support groups at U.A., as well as a weekly class on sex education. We can do a blood panel-”

At that moment, Midoriya chooses to come through the door to the hospital room without knocking. Todoroki apologizes fervently to the kind forces of the universe. “That will not be necessary, thank you,” he tells Recovery Girl.

She turns her stern expression away from Midoriya to smile at him. “Of course, sweetheart, let me know if you have any problems. Peppermint?”

Todoroki accepts the mints and watches her leave the room. He debates throwing out the plastic wrapped candies, but decides against it. Recovery Girl might use it as an excuse to come find him again.

“I’m sorry Todoroki, I didn’t think anyone was in here with you.” Midoriya fidgets in the doorway. Todoroki waves a hand at him.

“That’s fine, Midoriya. I had some questions. Mint?”

Midoriya takes the candy. He crinkles the cellophane wrapping in his fingers. "Is this about our fight with Hero Killer? I wanted to ask why you refused to use your Quirk the whole time. Once you were attacked, it was within your legal right to use it, but—"

He descends into mumbling, a second by second analysis of their fight paired with hero law and cited examples.

"It would be hard to prove that I only used my Quirk after I was attacked," Todoroki interrupts him. "Sure, there were witnesses, but Native had already lost a significant amount of blood at that point and both you and Iida could be complicit. Also the distinction of when Quirk use falls under intervention or self defense is very blurred."

"But you still could have—"

Pain has been seeping back into his senses, but as Midoriya starts arguing it seems to spike. His lacerated hand pulses and his broken ribs ache under his skin. Todoroki debates clicking up his morphine dose and falling back into a drug addled haze or bearing the pain with gritted teeth.

"Midoriya, I wanted to ask why you refused to remove Iida and Native from the scene and get a pro to help."

Midoriya looks genuinely confused. "I couldn't leave you, Todoroki."

There is irrational anger building in his bloodstream. Todoroki rationally realizes it is a mix of pain, left over humiliation, and maybe something akin to fear. However, Midoriya put his life at risk as well as Iida's and Native's.

“You not only put your life on the line, but also theirs.”

“So I should have let you fight him by yourself?”

“Yes,” Todoroki almost raises his voice. “I was better equipped to deal with him. It was the logical choice.”

“No you weren’t!” Todoroki’s eyes widen at Midoriya’s tone. The other boy stands up. “You couldn’t use your Quirk! You could have died!”

“I would not have.”

“Yes you could! You were in surgery for hours! Your father had to carry you to the hospital because the ambulance could not get here soon enough and you were drowning in your own blood.” Midoriya fists his hands in his wild green hair. He is breathing hard.

The mention of Endeavor jars Todoroki a bit. That must have been who caught him. The same feeling of disjointed confusion wells up inside of him. Why had Endeavor done that?

He switches tactics. “So let’s say that I did die, or that I was wounded by Hero Killer to the point I could not keep fighting him. What would you do? Iida might have recovered from his paralysis within the next few minutes, but could you hold Hero Killer off for that long? Could the two of you even hold him off in the first place?”

“If we worked together-”

“If somehow the three of us managed to work together, despite the fact that all three of us are close range fighters and one of us had a debilitating stab wound in the shoulder, we might have. But there’s a very slim chance of that happening without either of you or Native getting even more injured-”

“You could have used your Quirk while Iida and I fought him close range! You could have protected Native and made sure he didn’t get our blood and slowed him with your ice attacks. It would have-”

“It could have worked but then what happens when the teachers find out that I used my Quirk a second time without a license or instruction from a pro?”

“Detention, maybe. You saved our lives, they can’t arrest you-”

“Yes, they can. It is rare someone gets a second chance after doing something so illegal. There is no way I would have been offered a third.”

“They can’t do-”

“Midoriya my boy, are you in here?”

The door to Todoroki’s room slams open and everything suddenly makes sense.

Both he and Midoriya stop arguing to turn around and stare at the skeletal man who has just barged into the room. Todoroki is starting to feel a pattern in all his interactions today.

Wait. He recognizes this man. Something in the back of his head is calling attention to the green cargo pants, the white shirt that almost falls off his frame, black sclera, blue pupils, blonde hair cascading down his shoulders. He has seen those clothes before, in Youtube videos and on the news. He knows those facial features.

It's All Might. It is fucking All Might.

This is what has happened to the hero. This is why the man has stopped making so many public appearances, this is why it has taken him longer to defeat villains, this must be the reason for his six month long disappearance five years ago. Something happened to the man and he has somehow managed to keep his image up but it is visibly killing him.

Todoroki turns to look at Midoriya. The news wouldn't stop playing that video clip for a week. A *Quirkless* child trying to save his friend before All Might stepped in.

One piece of the puzzle has clicked but everything else is out of sync. He originally thought they were related, with the similarities in their Quirks and All Might's obvious concern for Midoriya. They still might be, but something in that assumption feels wrong. What had happened between that incident and the start of school? What had changed?

With the Sports Festival, Midoriya could not use his Quirk without injuring himself. But sometime over the past two weeks, he gained enough control to be able to increase his speed and punch Hero Killer without injuring himself. With Midoriya's analytical mind, it should not have taken him eleven or so years to be able to control his Quirk. And he definitely should not have learned how to in the space of two weeks.

There have been incidents of hidden Quirks, those that only appear under very specific circumstances. Midoriya's file was difficult to access, but Todoroki knows people. He also knows that Midoriya's Quirk designation had only changed after the entrance exam. While it could be a strength Quirk that only brought out by gaining muscle mass, Todoroki is suspicious.

His fingers itch for his phone to confirm something, anything. Does Midoriya know what happened to All Might? Does he know that the number one hero is dying?

"I hope I am not interrupting something," the man says. "I am Yagi Toshinori. It is nice to meet you, Todoroki."

And Todoroki is somehow furious in this moment. His frustration at Midoriya has transferred over to this skeletal figure in front of him. His shoulder burns, his hand beats in time to his heart, his breath wheezes out of him through his one and a half working lungs. Todoroki squints his eyes half shut and ignores the morphine clicker and instead lets that rage turn his voice acidic.

"Oh no," his tone is low and pointed, "we were just talking about how hot All Might is."

Midoriya makes a sound like a shredded dog toy. It's a mix between a squeak and a gasp. Todoroki grins with venom underneath his mask and stares at the man who probably taught Midoriya to risk his life instead of getting his friends to safety.

Todoroki knows he can't do anything, he cannot insult either of the two on their self-sacrificial bullshit or threaten them in any way. He settles for watching Yagi's face turn bright pink.

“I mean, have you seen his biceps?” Todoroki looks conspiratorially over at Midoriya. Midoriya stares back in horror. “They’re easily the size of-”

“I’ll be going then! I’ll talk to you later, Midoriya,” yells Toshinori as he practically flings himself out of the door. It rattles shut behind him. Midoriya makes a horrified sound in the back of his throat.

“I, I can’t believe...” Midoriya turns to Todoroki. He is red from the tips of his ears all the way down his neck. “You don’t, um, you don’t actually have a crush on All Might do you?”

Todoroki finally relents and grabs ahold of the morphine clicker. He tabs it twice before letting it swing back into the mess of cords by his side. “I unfortunately have a type,” he says before making a shooing gesture at Midoriya. “I’m going to sleep.”

He is kidding, mostly. All Might certainly does tick a few of his boxes (the largest of which being *loud*), but Todoroki’s time with Endeavor has poisoned his view of the man in a few ways. It is not that he cannot see the man as the symbol of peace he is, but rather the left over traces of expectations forcing him to view the man more as an opponent than an ally.

Midoriya is thankfully too taken aback to bring up their argument. He waves shakily at Todoroki and books it out the room at the same speed of his predecessor.

Kesagiriman comes around three hours later when Todoroki has given up on his nap. Their conversation is one that sticks with Todoroki as he is wheeled away to remove the tube from his chest. Todoroki has shouldered the disappointment of others many times before, but it always weighs him down. A part of him hopes that he will forget the man’s words in the haze of narcotics and local anesthesia.

When he drops off in the middle of his procedure, Todoroki consoles himself with the fact that at least he is able to sleep.

7:41am

Tokoyami Fumikage *created* **Concerned Friends Part VII**

Tokoyami Fumikage *invited* Shouji Mezou, Satou Rikidou, Kouda Kouji, *and* Hagakure Tooru

Tokoyami Fumikage: I am going to fucking scream

Shouji Mezou: I agree.

Satou Rikidou: y the fuck do we keep deleting this chat

Satou Rikidou: every time we do smth else happens

Kouda Kouji: true

Hagakure Tooru: so he's out of surgery?

Shouji Mezou: He went back in last night. Iida told me he was awake and coherent two days ago when they talked to the police chief.

Tokoyami Fumikage: The police chief talked to them??

Shouji Mezou: He did. It was apparently mostly about Iida's and Midoriya's behavior. Iida was reluctant to share more.

Satou Rikidou: all ive seen is the news. they r saying a vigilante took out Hero Killer and Endeavor arrested him

Hagakure Tooru: how did they get hurt then??

Shouji Mezou: Either this was another fight that all three of them were involved in, they fought the vigilante, or they fought Hero Killer before the vigilante showed up.

Tokoyami Fumikage: This doesn't make sense

Hagakure Tooru: lemme talk to Midoriya

Satou Rikidou: did iida say anything abt hero killer?

Kouda Kouji: ^^

Shouji Mezou: He did mention him. Let me send a screenshot of our conversation.

Tokoyami Fumikage: Wait. Hero Killer attacked Iida's brother

Satou Rikidou: so hero killer was looking for iida?

Tokoyami Fumikage: That must have been it. The coordinates Midoriya sent to the class group chat must have been after he found Iida

Shouji Mezou: convo_screenshot.jpeg

Hagakure Tooru: Midoriya said he isn't allowed to talk abt it until the police release the official report

Hagakure Tooru: we could just ask todoroki if hes up, he doesn't give a shit

Shouji Mezou: That is not a good thing, Hagakure.

Satou Rikidou: I rly wanna know tho

Kouda Kouji: same

Shouji Mezou: Let's come back to this later. We should organize visits around our schedules. Iida said Todoroki is not going to be returning to his training this week.

Satou Rikidou: Beet Down had a bad kidney stone so im stuck doing paperwork. I can visit tomorrow tho

Kouda Kouji: I dunno how im getting signal tbh. I can visit Saturday if im back

Shouji Mezou: I can possibly visit either tomorrow or this weekend when training is over. If there are any earthquakes or building collapses, Tenrescue might keep me until late Saturday night.

Tokoyami Fumikage: While I do feel more true to myself in the solemn darkness of the night, my schedule leaves me with little time to enjoy business hours of most establishments

Tokoyami Fumikage: I can visit Sunday

Satou Rikidou: bruh,,,

Satou Rikidou: how long did it take u to write that?

Kouda Kouji: (👁👁)

Hagakure Tooru: that's pretty fucking goth tokoyami

Tokoyami Fumikage: I did not choose the darkness. It was the other way around

Kouda Kouji: damn

Satou Rikidou: that's rly deep dude

Hagakure Tooru: anyway, I can visit todobro now. my pro is super chill as long as im here for training

Shouji Mezou: Tell us how it goes.

Tokoyami Fumikage: Please tell him we hope he gets better, but also express our opinions on the fact he keeps putting himself in danger like this

Kouda Kouji: ditto

Hagakure Tooru: I have a plan lol

-

Todoroki wakes up Friday morning to a heavy weight across his lap. He blearily opens his eyes and looks down at his. Two stocking covered legs greet him.

He blinks once, twice before it finally clicks in his brain. He looks to his left and sees a chair tipped back, a skirt bunched up enough that the elastic of a pair of thigh highs are visible, and a low cut tank top.

“Oh shit, you’re awake. Shouji and Satou are coming to visit you

tomorrow when they finish their training. It's sweet, they made this whole schedule about who would visit when. Kinda gay to be honest."

Huh. It's Hagakure. Todoroki tries to sit up and tenses at the sudden pain to his chest. Punctured lung, he remembers. He thinks back to the past couple hours. Recovery Girl, Midoriya, All Might, Kesagiriman, and surgery. He unfortunately remembers all the conversations he has had.

"Hagakure, aren't you 'kinda gay'?" He asks as he relaxes back into bed.

"Bi," she corrects. "Speaking of, Aizawa-sensei came by to visit."

Todoroki raises an eyebrow. This is news to him. From the windows to the right of his bed, it looks relatively early in the morning. He must have had another full night of sleep.

Hagakure pulls her feet off his lap and lets the front legs of her chair fall to the floor with a clatter. She drags the chair closer to the bed, blatantly ignoring the screech of metal against tile, and leans right next to his head.

Todoroki twitches when an invisible wave of hair falls over his mouth. He stares unimpressed at the front camera of the phone Hagakure has raised in front of their faces. The side of her cheek smooshes against his and he watches a crown of flowers appear over his head before she takes the picture.

She backs out of personal space to start typing a caption. Todoroki watches the silicon bunny ears of her phone case wave in the air with the force of her thumbs. "If you post that online, Aizawa-sensei is going to be mad."

“I’m just sending it to the class, minus rat bitch.” Todoroki ponders how Hagakure possibly got Bakugou’s snapchat. Or how she convinced Iida, Shouji, and Yaoyozoru to get one in the first place.

“Anyway,” the home button of Hagakure’s phone clicks twice as she changes tabs. “Aizawa-sensei visited. He looked super worried. It wasn’t visible under the exhaustion and waves of nihilism, but I could sense it.”

Todoroki hums. The only way to escape Hagakure’s rants is to physically run away, which he cannot at the moment. Well, he could leave, but he would be tracked down by his friends or teachers immediately and there would be another discussion about taking care of himself. He is willing to suffer hospitals and Hagakure when faced with interventions.

“But the most important thing,” Hagakure continues, “was that he was wearing these super tight jeans. You must have interrupted a date with that near death experience, because sensei was looking like a snack.”

Todoroki re-evaluates his views on an intervention. “Hagakure-”

“Mmm. I could write an entire TED talk about that ass. Present Mic-sensei is so lucky. He better treasure that ass because it is one of the Seven Wonders of the World. I bet you could bounce a coin off-”

“Hagakure-”

“And those thighs, do you think I could pay him to literally crush my head between-”

This is it. This is the hell he has to pay for his sins. He should never have tried to embarrass Midoriya or All Might, because whatever he gave came back to him a hundred fold. He looks desperately around for an escape to this conversation and spots his phone.

Todoroki twists onto his side to grab it off the hospital dresser. His entire torso and shoulder light up with pain but he grits his teeth and types a number out. The recipient picks up on the third ring, barely catching the end of the call.

“Wha-?” A voice croaks. The sound is distorted, like someone is speaking half into a pillow and half about a foot from their phone.

“I owe you one,” Todoroki replies and shoves his phone in Hagakure’s face. “Ojirou wants to hear about Midnight-sensei’s ass.”

“Oh!” Hagakure shrieks and grabs for his phone, letting her bunny themed atrocity fall into the folds of her skirt. She fumbles it briefly and presses the speaker against her tank top. “Don’t think we are done yet. This is what you deserve for being an idiot,” she whispers before winking and starting to talk at Ojirou.

Todoroki closes his eyes against the white noise of Hagakure’s odes to Midnight’s tits. He has only a few minutes of respite before even the ever patient Ojirou will hang up, and he plans to use them to the best of his ability. Namely, by ignoring Hagakure and planning his next moves now that Hero Killer has been removed from the playing field.

The League is using the videos of the man’s ideology to increase recruitment. Todoroki knows he could have prevented it in some ways by leaking dronehead’s clip of his fight, but he needs to protect Midoriya and Iida from the public eye. It would also not go over too

well with people to find out the police cover up.

They are going to be attacking again, but when and where? Are they going to try to face All Might again? Do they know about the man's connection to Midoriya?

He feels spread thin, worn out and bogged down by responsibility. There is too much for him to possibly do, but he must. It is a balancing act that has him hovering around the possibilities of getting poor grades, losing his friends, ruining the network he painstakingly set up, and jail time. All are unacceptable outcomes.

He's tired. It doesn't make sense after getting two full nights of sleep. He's gone longer with less and never felt this crushing exhaustion. Todoroki ponders the sinking feeling in his gut as Hagakure tosses back his phone and restarts their conversation.

11:21

Todoroki Fuyumi to Todoroki Shouto

[Unsent message] Fuyumi: Hey Shouto, I heard you got into a fight on

[Unsent message] Fuyumi: Shouto. I hope you are doing well, I

[Unsent message] Fuyumi: Are you okay???? I just heard

[Unsent message] Fuyumi: Dad called me today and told me that

[Unsent message] Fuyumi: sometimes I think you resent me because I could never do enough for you

[Unsent message] Fuyumi: I wish I could be a better sister. I'm so worri

[Unsent message] Fuyumi: Did you know mom used to call you an old soul? You were so mature for your age and so smart. We used to be

scared because you would never cry. Maybe that's why you were never afraid of

[Unsent message] Fuyumi: I've typed this out so many times. I can't even send you a text. Why am I

[Unsent message] Fuyumi: im so sorry shouto

Fuyumi: Are you alright, Shouto? I heard you were in the hospital after a fight during hero training. Did your surgery go well? Is it alright if I come visit you?

[Unsent message] Shouto: Fuyumi, I am fine. I cannot tell you about the fight yet because of the police investi

[Unsent message] Shouto: Hello Fuyumi, I am great. Surgery went well and

[Unsent message] Shouto: hi, im okay. surgery was fine. you don't need to visi

[Unsent message] Shouto: I have no idea how to interact with you

[Unsent message] Shouto: Am I supposed to treat you like a friend? Should I treat you like a mother? A teacher? A teammate?

[Unsent message] Shouto: What do siblings do? The only points of comparison I have aren't

[Unsent message] Shouto: sometimes I think it would be easier if you followed our older siblings and just left m

[Unsent message] Shouto: fuck

Shouto: Hello, Fuyumi. I'm healing. If you are able to visit me on Sunday before I am discharged, that would work for me.

Chapter End Notes

Todoroki you utter hypocrite.

Alright so there have been some changes in the timeline. Because Todoroki intervened in the way he did, Midoriya's only injury was the small cut Hero Killer first gave him. Likewise, Iida never took a bunch of knives to the arm to protect Todoroki. He does not have nerve damage. Todoroki also does not bear the nick name 'Hand Crusher' in this universe.

I'm all better! Thank you again for all the kind words. This chapter was a bit delayed today, but its only ten in my timezone so technically I'm fine. Update schedule is going to be transitioning to every three (3) days as school/work has started up again. Next chapter will be up Sunday. See you then!

Exams

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Todoroki comes to class on Monday with his right arm in a sling and bandages taped over the stitches on his ribs. Recovery Girl was kind enough to heal his hands before his discharge from the hospital, and all that remains of the deep cut through his palm is a thick scar.

“Yo,” he says as he passes Uraraka, who looks to be having a religious experience doing kata. He knows that feeling.

“Damn Iida, that’s a pretty badass scar!”

“Thank you, Hagakure. Please do not swear in class.”

“Whoa dude, what happened to your—wait is that Bakugou?” Sero yells past Todoroki’s head. He glances back too. Anger-issues is sporting a respectable, combed over hairstyle and is giving off near-demonic energy. Kirishima pulls out his phone and is tackled.

“The chaos of human interaction is such a strange thing. Perhaps the turmoil here is a manifestation of what lurks inside our minds.”

Todoroki sits down and stares at Tokoyami. The other boy is perched on top of his desk, surveying the classroom with an air of detachment. “Tokoyami,” Satou says on Todoroki’s right, “what the fuck?”

Tokoyami side eyes him. “What a mad banquet of darkness.”

Satou puts his head down on his desk. Kouda laughs.

The conversation moves to hero agencies. Most of the class tried to train for villain apprehension, with a few exceptions. Shouji worked with Mina in evacuation and logistical support, both learning how to respond to natural disasters. Kouda did search and rescue work in Akan National Park.

Someone brings up Todoroki's, Iida's, and Midoriya's involvement in the Hero Killer incident. Todoroki pulls his phone out and lets the other two field questions.

"Sure he's scary, but did you watch the video, Ojiro? You can really see his tenacity, his one-track mind. Kind of cool, don't you think?"

"Still killed people," Todoroki says from behind his phone. A notification pops up from his chat site. Giran's threatening to sell him out again.

"Okay, but-

"If you have to kill someone to prove a point, you don't have a good point." Todoroki knows Giran won't sell him out, but he could start working for a higher bidder. Or worse, he could start withholding valuable information about the League.

"Yeah, but-

Midoriya finally interrupts and Kaminari realizes who he is speaking

in front of. Iida starts the class with conviction

Foundational Hero Studies takes place out of the classroom today, so after English with Present Mic, everyone heads towards the locker rooms. Kaminari shows off a scar he got during training. According to him, it was from a fight during patrol, but Sero is quick to inform the group it was actually from tripping over a stray cat and face planting into a rosebush.

Todoroki's and Iida's costumes are in the Support Labs for repair so they both wear their gym uniforms to the class.

"Todobro," Satou leans over as everyone walks towards the cityscape set up for training, "are you sure you're able to work out? I mean, power to you if you can, but I'm low-key, high-key worried."

That is a valid concern. Todoroki is wearing his sling under the jacket of his gym uniform. While he could forgo it if he needs to, he doubts Recovery Girl would let him off easy for aggravating his injuries.

He shrugs. All Might will probably say something.

The exercise is introduced: a rescue-training race. The first five are called up and Todoroki watches as Midoriya outpaces everyone before misjudging the stability of a pipe and falling to last place. Anger-issues seethes in the back over something, but Todoroki is not really paying attention. Dark Shadow has managed to manifest a pair of hands out of Tokoyami's back and is doodling in the dust. Todoroki thinks he can make out the sloppy hiragana for 'bird man won't rap battle'.

When Todoroki's name is called, he steps forward. All Might looks over their group once, before backtracking and facing Todoroki.

Todoroki is pleased to note a bit of a stammer in All Might's voice. He certainly hasn't forgotten the conversation he walked in on.

"Todoroki, my boy. You might want to sit this one out."

He acquiesces easily and watches Tokoyami soar past the group on Dark Shadow.

"Hey," a voice comes by his left side. Todoroki pointedly does not twitch. Instead, he laments the loss of his peripherals, and hums in acknowledgement.

"I kinda feel bad," Hagakure whispers. "But it's also fucking hilarious. Do you know how many times I have skipped this class? I'm still getting an A in it for some reason."

"That's not necessarily a thing to be proud of," Todoroki replies in a murmur. He is smiling under his mask though.

"Nah, it's good. I'm here for the important shit."

Todoroki thinks back. "Wait, did you miss all those lessons on public relations? The ones we had to go on a stage for while the rest of the class yelled about rumors, gossip, and invasive questions?"

"I was there," he can hear the smirk in her voice. "I just never took a turn. That was too funny to miss."

“Anger-issues, especially. I thought he was going to break every time Midoriya opened his mouth.”

“And when Tokoyami refused to comment when Satou asked about the pallid bust of Pallas.”

“Good times.” He straightens when the last group finishes.

“See you in math,” she replies.

The weird short kid tries to look into the girl’s locker room through a hole in the wall. Iida almost has a stroke before one of Jirou’s jacks pokes the kid in the eye.

“I hope that hurt,” Tokoyami mutters. He yanks on Todoroki’s tie, tying the knot tighter than what Todoroki would prefer.

“I’m delicate, Fumikage,” Todoroki reminds him.

“Not delicate enough to not get stabbed,” Tokoyami says. He is a bit gentler when he pulls Todoroki’s collar down, however.

-

Class Rankings come out the week before final exams. Todoroki is second, right behind Yaoyorozu. It is not surprising. Yaoyorozu puts in the most effort she can for each assignment, while getting nothing wrong. She goes above and beyond regularly. Todoroki only puts in the bare minimum for a perfect score.

His friends have not done as well. Shouji is the closest in score at tenth.

“Guys,” Satou turns to Kouda and Todoroki, “Midterms weren’t that bad, but I have a feeling that finals’re gonna be much harder.”

‘Study group?’ Kouda signs.

“That may be an profitable idea.” Tokoyami’s eyes are still trained on the list of rankings. Shouji wanders over and pats him on the shoulder.

“Fourteenth isn’t that bad,” Todoroki says. His eyelids feel inexplicably heavy. Fuyumi Facetimed him last night, which was interesting, but it pushed back a couple essays he needed to finish.

He has been taking it easy to recover from Hero Killer. Unfortunately that means he is full of nervous energy with no good way to release it. To go from running an average of fifty miles a week, plus lifting and working on his Quirk, to only twenty is hell on his normally spotty ability to fall asleep.

Only a few more weeks, Todoroki reminds himself.

“I’m almost in the bottom fifth of the class. That is unthinkable, even with my constant struggle to cage the beasts inside my heart.”

Shouji rubs Tokoyami’s back in a soothing gesture. “You’ll be fine.”

“You could be Hagakure,” Todoroki points out. He feels her flip him off from across the room.

“Damn, roasted.” Satou stands up when the bell rings. “Come on, Present Mic’s handing back those tests we took.”

Tokoyami grumbles but follows him towards the door.

“Today after school?” Signs Kouda.

Todoroki grimaces. That might not work. “How about Wednesday?” He offers.

“Sure, let’s go to that café thing by that one ramen place. It’s pretty close to all of our places. We can even go to my house after. My brothers were askin’ about you, Todobro.”

“We can take the train over after school,” Shouji adds.

Satou, Tokoyami, and Kouda reply with varying levels of enthusiasm. Todoroki wonders what they are going to in a study group. He has rarely studied for anything in his life. At least he can probably bait Tokoyami into buying him coffee.

“Oi, Todoroki.”

His group pauses and turns to Aizawa. “I’ll catch up,” Todoroki says

and waves them on. He goes to stand in front of Aizawa's desk as the door slams shut.

Aizawa shuffles a stack of papers into a remarkably organized binder. The snap of the binder's rings closing is impossibly loud in the quiet room. Todoroki waits as Aizawa crams the binder into his messenger bag and stands.

Todoroki has never been a particularly tall man. At fifteen, he is only two inches off his previous adult height. Given Endeavor, he can expect to continue growing into his late teens.

Aizawa barely makes six feet, but something in the three inches between them eclipses just their height difference. Todoroki knows he stands out from his fellow students. He is too smart, too put together (even when he is falling apart), too serious in equal terms with too distinct in humor. He carries himself with confidence that escapes people twice his age. He can do the job of three adults easily, and five when he pushes himself. And he has always been pushing himself.

Aizawa is the closest thing Todoroki has ever encountered to his old world. They are so alike that it is eerie, but only where it counts. They have the same drive, the same ability to work themselves to the bone, the same soft spots that they cannot keep people from wiggling into, the same look in their eyes. Aizawa stands out from people his age the same way Todoroki eclipses his fellow students.

The difference between them is that Aizawa manages this without thirty years of extra experience. That is what makes him dangerous. That is what Todoroki respects him for.

Todoroki considers him one of the best heroes because of the way he works. He is efficient, skilled, and adaptable. He does not fight for fame or money or ranking, but—Todoroki assumes—because it is the

right thing to do. In another world, Todoroki would follow this man anywhere.

Todoroki considers him to be one of the best *people* he has met for a similar reason: Aizawa is an adult.

It sounds too simple in his head, but it is true. Todoroki came from a world where he was given rubber kunai to teeth on. He was indoctrinated at five. He was sent to war at six, was deemed an acceptable loss by his team at six, was promoted to lead a team at six, came home with blood on his hands and said something he regrets to this day and lost his only remaining family at six. Everyone he loved had died by the time he was fourteen. He buried himself with a mask and broke something inside his soul and wrecked his sense of humor and only climbed out seven years later.

In none of those years did he become an adult.

He grew up, yes. Children aged very early in those days. He could pay his bills, do his laundry, and buy his groceries at twelve. He truly became a functioning human at twenty-two. He could head a dictatorship at thirty.

However, there is a difference between lost innocence and maturity.

Todoroki met Uzumaki Mito once in his life. He must have been four, about to enter the academy, and his father had just enough influence as a clan head to stand by the woman's deathbed. He remembers pieces of that day: the warmth of his father's hand, the cool breeze blowing through a window, a single sunflower just curling in on itself, the shine in the woman's eyes. He asked her, he thinks, if she was going to die. His father had moved to apologize but Mito waved him off.

“Yes,” she said with a smile lined in wrinkles. She must have been over one hundred at that point, must have spent at least seventy of those years without the man she loved by her side. Must have spent many of those years watching her friends and family die.

Todoroki remembers a gust of air ruffling the curtains into air and leaving them to drift into the room. The sunflower on the dresser shook and a child’s handful of seeds clattered from it.

“Are you afraid?” He had asked. His father had given Mito a pained glance. Todoroki was not versed in social interaction then. Still not is, in many ways.

And Mito had laughed. It was a hoarse thing, no longer bell-like as all the books at said. She folded her hands together on her blanket and Todoroki could see the individual bones of her fingers shift under his thin skin.

“Very,” she had said in that raspy voice. Her grin was bright even then, as each heartbeat counted down to her last. “But I am happy too.”

“Because you will see your family?”

“No, little Hatake. I am happy because tonight will have the most beautiful sunset I will ever see. Kushina will come by and tell me about her day, and she might talk about things that have no impact on my life, but they will be important to me because she is. I am happy because every time I look out my window, every time someone comes to see me off, I see something that I accomplished.

“I am afraid, yes, but tomorrow will have the most beautiful sunrise this world has witnessed. Even if I am not around to see it, those that do—my village and my friends and my family and even my enemies—will enjoy it for me.”

Todoroki did not understand then, barely understands now, but Uzumaki Mito was an adult in a world full of broken children.

There are many more people like that here, but Todoroki has not met many. The one he has, the one who he interacts with daily, stands before him.

“You didn’t email me your analysis of the consistency of Quirk Law enforcement before class,” Aizawa says. He slings his messenger bag onto his shoulder and fishes the classroom keys from his pocket.

Todoroki opens his mouth to reply. Closes it. Thinks.

He forgot. It is sitting on a USB drive in his backpack. He made a mental note to send it, has made mental notes for the past month he has had to complete these essays for detention. But it slipped his mind.

What else has he forgotten?

“Send it to me before school ends. Next week, meet me after school on Friday to discuss the next assignment.”

Aizawa waves him out the door. Todoroki waits in the hall with a racing mind as Aizawa locks up.

“Todoroki,” he says, “If you need an extension, let me know. You have my email. It’s alright to ask for help.”

He turns to face Todoroki. There’s a thick shadow of stubble on Aizawa’s jaw, heavy bags under his eyes, and his hair hangs limply over half his face.

“Got it? Aizawa asks.

“Yes sir.”

Aizawa stares at him for a moment longer. Then he snorts and adjusts the strap of his bag over his chest. “Get to class, the bell’s gonna ring in half a minute.”

Todoroki nods. He walks to English and feels Aizawa’s eyes on the back of his neck the whole way.

-

You have 53 unread messages.

Class 1-a Group Chat (School-Related Matters Only)

Remember to bring three No. 2 pencils, a calculator, and an eraser to tomorrow’s exam...

Three Tall Boys (and two short ones)

good luck tomorrow guys!

Midoriya Izuku

hey Todoroki! thanks again for studying with me. I have another idea about electro-static...

Admin 1

[www.herofeed.com/AntiBoard-new-anonymous-bullying-site fuckers](http://www.herofeed.com/AntiBoard-new-anonymous-bullying-site-fuckers) wrote another one...

Hagakure Tooru

I s2g if u don't shut ur dumb face ill cut out pics of present mic from gossip mags and tap...

k1llj0y

My friend, if you don't send the 1mil upfront, I'm afraid I'll be unable to help you. We both...

Shinsou Hitoshi

If you manage to talk to Aizawa-sensei about that, I'll owe you one. Thanks.

Satou Rikidou

u ok dude? u almost fell asleep in math friday. I mean, I feel that but just wondering

Cult Member 5

I apologize for Honcho's behavior. We will send payment plus extra for the last minute re...

Cult Member 13

Don't worry abt him, he's just stressed. Sorry for the late notice. Could you send it tmrw? i...

Todoroki Fuyumi

Does the weekend after exams work for you?

Ojiro Mashirao

www.masupply.com/bo-staff I'm not sure if this is what you meant, but it has all the specifi...

Hatsume Mei

Hi Todoroki! Your hero costume should be out of the shop today. Do you want to add any of...

Not A Cult Leader

I forgot to tell you the teach assigned it to us. 9 pages double-spaced about Keynesian Econo...

Shouji Mezou

Attachments: 1 Image

Shouji Mezou

Tokoyami is letting Dark Shadow quiz him about conjunctions.

Admin 3

Global update patch is ready. I had some ideas about navigating around the ban in Germany...

The 20% Journal

We have received your article ‘Implications of the “Might Is Right” Phenomena in Hero Work’ and...

It's Not a Fight Club, We Promise Aizawa (Tooru + Friends)

Anyone know what the fuck a parabola is?

Shark

Hey boss, do u think u can send me next month's pay? My mom's sick so I cant take that many...

Kouda Kouji

Attachments: 4 Images

-

The written exam on Thursday is ridiculously easy. Todoroki finishes half an hour early and puts his head down on his desk. He does not sleep, cannot sleep where he feels too vulnerable, but he lets his eyes close and his breathing even out.

He is running on fumes. The week leading up to exams has been one of his most stressful ones. He carved time into his week to meet with

Midoriya to discuss Quirks, Mei to go over his revised hero costume, Shinsou to spar, and with his friends to study. When he couldn't make room for people while also maintaining his online presence, he shaved hours off his sleep schedule.

It shows. His visible eye has a deep purple bruise underneath it. One of his connections remembered that they had a nine-page essay on Keynesian economics for their course and called in a favor two days before it was due. With Giran raising his prices more than ever now, Todoroki cannot afford to lose another asset.

He pulled two all-nighters in a row to complete the essay. Honcho's followers apologized profusely, but in the end, that is all they can do. Todoroki has been doing their leader's college assignments for almost three years now. Singlehandedly getting a bachelor's degree for someone makes good money, but it is a lot of work.

The room is full of the sound of graphite on paper. Todoroki breathes and listens to someone drop their calculator with a clatter, to Midoriya trying to not to mumble, to bouncing legs as a room full of teenagers faces the thing they have been stressing over for months.

He has been awake for almost seventy-two hours at this point. It's not the longest he's gone without sleeping, that would be reserved for his black ops days, but it's taxing. On top of his already debilitating sleep deficit and the mounting stress of everything catching up to him, it has an impact on his life. He hasn't quite been snapping at people, but his conversations are short. Shorter than the usual small comments he has. He has never been quite vocal to begin with, but his more reserved behavior is apparent.

Todoroki is almost painfully glad when Vlad King calls time and collects the tests. Kouda jumps at the sudden noise beside him, but recovers enough to hand his exam in. He and Satou fist bump with matching expressions of joy and despair. Tokoyami presses his hands together in silent prayer.

They are escorted as a class into the changing rooms and rumor runs rampant as everyone discusses what the next phase of the exam will be. Kaminari has apparently talked to the upperclassmen, and robots sound like an easy pass. Or an easier pass. Todoroki is not very worried about what the physical exam has in store for him.

He shrugs into his Kevlar shirt and adjusts the cuffs of his sleeves. The thick scar across his palm is still numb to the touch. It hasn't impeded his grip much, but the lack of sensation is unsettling. At least the red patches from burns and frostbite crawling up his torso and arms were not on already sensitive areas of skin.

Todoroki remembers the first time he tried to use Chidori. That was before he learned to ground himself against lightening chakra. Minato had just learned how to weaponize pure chakra and Todoroki sought to go one step further.

He got it eventually, but the first time he tried he had ended with purple bruising spiderwebbing down his arm. It stung at first, then faded, then there had been no feeling. He must have flailed around or something, because he remembers Obito laughing.

It was called keraunoparalysis, temporary paralysis caused by lightening strikes. Generating pure lightening chakra and concentrating it above his skin was not a good idea. Before Rin had managed to worm her healing through his burnt nerves, his whole left hand was a mess of cold flesh. He always returns to this memory when faced with new scar tissue. Pins in needles in his arm as Obito laughed and Rin's frown of exasperation broke into giggles.

"Ready?" Shouji asks. Todoroki blinks back into the present and nods. He pulls on the pair of fingerless gloves he ordered from the support department. They are sturdy leather, with steel reinforcements along the back and grips in the palm. It's not enough to stop a sword head

on, but it hopefully won't sting as much if he managed to redirect the flat of a blade again.

Shouji doesn't mention how he almost stumbled while trying to get his boots on. That's what Todoroki likes about Shouji. He is silent in his concern, supportive without actively mentioning anything. Shouji gives him space and doesn't make Todoroki feel guilty when his busy schedule gets in the way of hanging out.

Todoroki would compare him to someone he knew before, in a different world, but he is tired right now. Too exhausted to remember and too busy to mourn. It's a good feeling at the same time it is a worrying one. But it is all he can do right now, to just react to whatever comes his way and try to juggle everything he has committed to.

When they step out into the parking lot, their teachers are waiting for them. No robots are in sight and Todoroki has a feeling that Kaminari's upperclassmen were bluffing.

Nedzu burrows out of Aizawa's scarf and announces the revised practical. A fight against their teachers, certified pros of very high rankings.

It sounds remarkably like the bell test. Nedzu holds up a pair of handcuffs and Todoroki's mouth. A test of teamwork and planning. One that is a bit tougher though, given their abilities are a good deal stronger than those of fresh genin. Just teamwork is not going to be enough to succeed. They will have to coordinate their attacks and go for any weaknesses against certified pro heroes.

"First, Todoroki is with Yaoyorozu," Aizawa smirks and adjusts his scarf, "against me."

Ah, and isn't that a match. Todoroki is significantly more intrigued. He has no idea how his skills match up against Aizawa's. The man is an expert in hand-to-hand combat and has experience in spades. Though Todoroki can feel the pressure of exhaustion behind his eyes, he is excited.

He does like a challenge. Especially when there are no real stakes. Not being able to attend training camp might be enough to spur most of the class, but Todoroki is not worried. This will be more like sparring than anything else. Plus, with Yaoyorozu, he is almost guaranteed to succeed.

The bus ride over to training facility is brief. Aizawa lounges across a row of seats towards the front and dozes off almost immediately. Yaoyorozu keeps looking towards him nervously, but the man never stirs.

From where he has tucked himself against the window (left side emergency exit, easy to open and relatively far from the fuel tank) with his leg hanging lazily off an armrest, Todoroki turns to where Yaoyorozu is sitting behind him. "You ready?" He asks.

She jolts and whips around from where she is eyeing Aizawa again. "Yes. I've gained almost twenty pounds over the past month. While roughly seven pounds of that should be water weight, I most likely have enough fat to complete the test."

Todoroki blinks. He had of course logically known Yaoyorozu needed to have stores of lipids to use her Quirk, but he had never actively thought about the diet she must need to maintain to use her Quirk effectively.

Satou is similar, he remembers. His friend is meticulous in scanning food labels and choosing ones with less sugar and carbohydrates. Eating more than his daily values leads to the activation of his Quirk, which is not good if he has school.

Todoroki shifts and reaches into a pouch on his side. He pulls out a couple of throwing knives and grips them in his mouth through the mask as he hunts through the pockets. When he finds what he's looking for, he drops the knives into his lap and turns to Yaoyorozu with an energy bar in his hand.

"Just in case," he says as he passes it through the gap in the seats. Yaoyorozu takes it with an almost confused expression. "Chocolate chip, 250 calories," he clarifies.

Yaoyorozu looks at the bar in her hands. Part of it has broken inside the packaging and the slight bend in its shape is apparent. A small smile spreads across her face. "Thank you, Todoroki."

He shrugs and puts his knives away. He would have forgotten to eat it anyway.

They arrive at the training ground a little over twenty minutes after the ride started. Aizawa gets off the bus and walks over to the replica town. Yaoyorozu follows Todoroki after him, pausing to thank the bus driver.

Aizawa stops when he gets to a small entrance in the wall around the battlefield. "I'm not going to repeat what Nedzu already told you, so I hope you paid attention," Aizawa says. "You get fifteen minutes to get into the battlefield and orient yourself before the test begins."

He adjusts the thick, weighted bracelets on his arms. Todoroki tracks

how he almost undershoots the distance to slide his key card through the door's scanner. His aim will be off.

Aizawa passes them the handcuffs as the door pops open. "What are you waiting for? It's already started," he says. Todoroki is only able to see a sadistic grin on Aizawa's face before he is sprinting, glancing over his shoulder once to check if Yaoyorozu is following him.

A wide road that seems to cut across the whole training ground dead ends at the door they step through. Small shops border it and Todoroki can see houses and apartment buildings lining the streets branching off from the main artery. A vantage point, he decides. Something high up but relatively unobtrusive to start planning.

He ducks out of the main road, turning down a side street and swinging his eye around to look for any locations that would fit his needs. Right between a set of pastel painted shops, an alley cuts further into the residential district. Todoroki reaches out to tug Yaoyorozu through it.

She squeaks when he grabs her hand, but follows him. The alley snakes between low apartment buildings before opening back up into a shaded street. They race across the sidewalk and through a park before Yaoyorozu starts lagging.

Todoroki immediately drops his sprint into an easy run. He is going to have to settle with something soon so Yaoyorozu doesn't use up all her stamina before the fight actually starts. He is sure she can keep sprinting longer, but if she burns through the sugar in her bloodstream and starts using up her stores of fat, she is going to have less to work with later.

A slightly elevated house with a second story catches his eye. It's blocked off from the sidewalk around the park by a thick concrete

wall. The pointed roof crests over the foliage in the area, but the building's height does not dwarf its neighbors. There are a couple unfortunate trees blocking a window, but everything else is adequate.

“Here,” Todoroki says. Yaoyorozu comes to a stop by him and barely jumps as Todoroki links their elbows. “Hold on,” he tells her as he starts to form a pillar of ice under their feet.

He raises them up to the top of the wall and steps over it to drop lightly on his feet. Yaoyorozu stumbles a bit on her landing, but rights herself without grimacing. “What is the plan?” She asks.

The backyard of the house is neatly trimmed and, oddly enough, contains a swing set. Todoroki jogs up to the back door and bends down level to the knob. “Vantage point.” He puts his right hand up to the keyhole and freezes the lock.

“And then?”

Todoroki stands up and motions for her to step back with him. He rears back and slams his foot against the door with a solid thud. Something cracks. The sound of the door bolt breaking off inside the frame ripples out into the quiet of the backyard. The door swings open silently and Todoroki walks through.

Hopefully the wall and surrounding trees muffle the noise. Todoroki closes the door behind Yaoyorozu and turns to look inside the house.

It's eerily empty. Wooden supports block off where walls would be, but the first story is completely open. Yaoyorozu's shoes taps against the bare floorboards as she follows Todoroki up the stairs.

When they clear the landing, they are greeted with the same empty space as the first story. Even the rafters are visible, unpainted beams bridging up and into the shadow of the pointed roof. Todoroki peers through the closest window and is pleased to find his view of the battlefield almost completely unobstructed.

“Over here,” Yaoyorozu calls from the other side of the floor. She points towards a wide, rectangular window that takes up most of the upper third of the wall. Todoroki follows her finger to where her nail is pressed against the glass, right over a small gate on the other side of the town. Todoroki can just make out the pale shape of the principle’s head in the distance.

“Do you see Aizawa?”

She shakes her head, but her eyes continue to trace over the buildings. After scanning all the other windows, Todoroki joins her to stare at the gate.

“We have a couple of options,” He holds a hand to the wall and concentrates. A faint line of frost spreads from his fingers and makes a circle against the stucco. His eye narrows as he presses a finger off center to make a dot, then draws a line through the curve in the circle. “This is where we are,” he points to the dot. “The gate is about a mile away from us,” he gestures to the line.

Yaoyorozu nods as she looks at his diagram.

“He is relatively unlikely to find us in this house. We can continue hiding and continuing through side-streets to get to the gate, but this puts us at a disadvantage. Aizawa only needs to protect the gate. He will most likely move around, but it will be in a very small area by the gate. We could ambush him around there, but there is little to no chance that we will make it through the gate undetected.”

Todoroki runs a finger from the dot to the line in the circle. Some of the stucco catches under his fingernail. “Or we could try to find Aizawa first and not worry about stealth. We have about five minutes to decide a course of action before the test begins.”

He looks over at Yaoyorozu. Her face is pinched, brows drawn together over her eyes. “What do you think?” She asks.

Todoroki blinks. He expected her to add her input. “I think we should head towards Aizawa and try to find him. Either I engage him while you run towards the exit, we both engage, or we somehow trap him.”

She nods again. Todoroki is puzzled. “Do you have any preferences? Additions?”

“Whatever you think is best.”

Huh. That’s interesting.

“Then we should both start out fighting him, you providing long range support while I engage him directly. If it looks like I can stall him while you escape through the exit, let’s do that.

“If you start heading towards the gate and I am taken down, I will try to alert you somehow. Most likely by yelling, but if I am gagged or about to be knocked out, could you make a button or something I could press to signal to you?”

“Yes.”

“Alright.”

They are cut off by the screech of the alarm. Their time has started.

“Let’s go,” Todoroki says. “We can try to get as close as possible to the gate before attacking. I am going to keep a small flame going as we run, and if it doesn’t take up too much fat, you can start making something small. As soon as we can’t use our Quirks, we know he has spotted us.”

He takes the stairs two at a time and weaves around the supports to reach the front door. As he is starting to ice the bolt, Yaoyorozu speaks up.

“I am not surprised, Todoroki, that you could hammer out a strategy against Aizawa-sensei just like that. You are excellent at finding the best approach with your judgment.”

“Thanks,” he says. Todoroki kicks the front door open like he did to the back door and hurries to catch it before it slams into the wall. “You too.”

There’s a pause behind him. “You think so?”

Todoroki lets fire wisp up from his skin and spin across his gloved hand. He starts an easy pace towards the gate. “Yeah.”

It’s not a lie. She created a hydraulic press and a scooter during the Quirk assessment without any reference material nearby. It was not a

scheduled test, so there was no way for her to have known what to prepare for. That means she found the best way to get the top score out of a plethora of designs she must have learned.

Yaoyorozu is incredibly smart and very dedicated. It would be one thing to just have her grades, but she has a working index of things she can create memorized down to atomic structure and composition. That takes serious study.

“I don’t know,” she says. Her voice is quite against the even beat of their feet on asphalt. “I got into U.A. under special recommendation while you didn’t. I had a stronger starting point but when it comes to practical hero skills, I haven’t shown anything worth mentioning. I barely was able to get a team together for the calvary battle and was knocked out in the first round of the tournament while you won both. I haven’t grown at all.”

Todoroki takes a left onto a wide street. They are only half a mile away from their goal and his fire is still flickering. He slows to a walk and turns his head towards Yaoyorozu. “Do you know why I did not get into U.A. on special recommendation?” He asks.

She is slow to look at him. When she finally meets his eye, he continues. “Endeavor was training me from the minute I got my Quirk. I was basically homeschooled through middle school I missed so many days of class. Learning to fight was more important than attending.”

Nothing moves on the street except them. The stillness is disconcerting.

“I didn’t get into U.A. on special recommendation because Endeavor wanted to show me off to the world. Scores from the special recommendation test do not get factored into the general scores.

When you are recommended, you are guaranteed a spot in U.A. The test is only to determine which class level you are placed in.

“I was in the general group first to be a comparison against the majority of the students. I was in there second so my scores would be public knowledge. Endeavor knew I would break the record by a significant amount and he wanted everyone know. Third, the public would be reminded again during the sports festival as the top student has to give the pledge. I would then cement my test scores with a gold medal.”

They have come to a stop. Todoroki knows his face is blank, is expressionless and unaffected and devoid of any indication of his opinion towards the man who raised him. His voice is even and his hands do not twitch to his knives. He is empty.

“If you want to compare yourself to me, someone who was practically born into this profession, feel free to do so. But understand why there is a difference in our skills. And don’t use my victories to put yourself down. That helps no one. If you feel like you haven’t gotten better, and you have by the way, work to correct that.”

Todoroki’s breaks eye contact with Yaoyorozu to rub his left hand through his hair. God, he’s fucking tired. “I’ll train with you, if you want. On Saturdays Hagakure and I get together to spar. Sometimes Ojiro or Shinsou show up. Just... don’t let your perceived lack of progress discourage you.”

He faces Yaoyorozu again and panics when he sees her eyes shine with moisture. “Please don’t cry. I’m not good with that.”

She starts to laugh, but it turns into a hiccup, which only makes her giggle harder. Yaoyorozu nods, rubbing the heels of her hands under her eyes. “Thank you, Todoroki,” she says. Her smile is wobbly, but

it's there.

“Yeah, sure,” he scans the street again. “Anytime. Let’s finish this.”

Does he just give speeches of encouragement now? Who is he, Naruto? Todoroki resists pulling his fingers through his hair again in awkward energy and-

Wait, his hand.

“Yaoyorozu!”

“As sweet as this is,” Aizawa’s voice comes from above their heads, “you’re running out of time.”

Todoroki whips around, fingers of his right hand already dipping into his pouch for knives. Aizawa is standing on top of a telephone pole, scarf twisting around him with the force of his Quirk. He bends into a crouch and throws himself off the pole and towards the two of them.

“Get out of his view and try to attack!” Todoroki yells at Yaoyorozu. He goes to throw his knives but is too slow. A length of Aizawa’s capture weapon loops around his wrist and wrenches it to the side. Another end flies through the air towards his torso but Todoroki drops to the ground.

He rolls to the side and uses the material wrapped around his wrist to pull himself to his feet. Aizawa tries to tug him forward as he leans into the weight of the weapon, but Todoroki sticks a foot out to hold his ground. He slides his Ka-Bar out of its sheath and brings it up to try to cut through the scarf.

The knife grinds against the carbon and metal alloy fibers of the capture weapon. The material does not part against the serrated blade. Todoroki grits his teeth. His mind flashes through what he knows about Aizawa's fighting style.

The man follows up his attack by racing towards Todoroki, capture weapon unspooling in wild sheaves. He's trying to ensnare Todoroki in them again, Todoroki realizes. He feints another roll and jumps over Aizawa's kick. He is almost tangled in one of the spiraling loops, but is able to catch the cloth with his knife and redirect the closing knot above his head.

Aizawa punches towards the side of his neck and Todoroki pulls back. He feels air from the attack brush over the fabric of his mask. He blocks another punch to his gut with a forearm and bends his knees to duck as Aizawa shifts his weight onto his left foot and swings the other towards his head.

Todoroki lunges towards Aizawa's back as the force of the man's kick shifts his torso away from Todoroki. He stabs towards Aizawa's right side and is batted away. He tries to grab Aizawa's fist as it lashes towards his own right side, but it pulls away from his grasp before impact. Two more punches come towards his left. Todoroki feels a grin spread over his face as he realizes sensei isn't above going for his blind side.

He spins out of the way of the first and plants his foot in Aizawa's stomach while he lets the other one thud against his plate mail. It will bruise, but it's nothing he hasn't experienced. Aizawa manages to clench his abs with a huff of breath and Todoroki's foot meets a ring of muscle. The spikes of his boots must hurt, but Aizawa ignores it to grab a hold of Todoroki's leg and tug him forward the length of material still bound around Todoroki's right wrist. He sends the other end of his weapon towards Todoroki's other leg to try to pull him off his feet.

Todoroki's eye creases with a smirk, leaving only a sliver of his vision. He wrenches his hips to the side and twists in Aizawa's grasp, kicking off the ground and spinning so the heel of his left boot catches Aizawa in the head. The man reels to the side and instinctively loosens the hand on Todoroki's right leg. He stumbles back a step as Todoroki lands and races into the opened space, slashing towards the man's thigh.

Aizawa somehow is able to redirect the end of the scarf aimed for Todoroki's foot to trap his other wrist. He grips the weapon with both, scarred hands, and shifts his stance, trying to pull Todoroki to the side.

Todoroki goes with the motion and feels the tepid feeling of his Quirk seep back into his limbs. He catches himself by sticking a foot out and lets fire erupt from his body, forcing Aizawa to leap back.

"Todoroki, catch!" Yaoyorozu screams. She tosses him a piece of plastic with a white button in the center and a bright red matryoshka doll.

He is able to twist his knife bearing hand out of the capture weapon. The fire dies and Todoroki slides his boot across the ground to create an arc of ice. He has to drop his knife to catch the panic button and doll. It scitters across the frosted ground.

Yaoyorozu takes off running towards the gate. Aizawa loops a stretch of his capture weapon around the top of a telephone pole and pulls himself up and over the spines of ice Todoroki created. He feels his Quirk vanish as Aizawa's eyes fall onto him.

"So that's your plan then," Aizawa says. Todoroki shakes his right arm

to try to dislodge the scarf ensnaring his wrist. Aizawa smirks as it holds firm.

Time to change plans. Todoroki moves his arm in three quick circles to wrap the capture weapon further down his forearm and grabs a steady hold on it. He could dislocate his thumb and slip through the knot, but that would put his hand mostly out of commission for the rest of the fight. He can power through, but it would not be fun and might tear something important.

His other hand sticks the doll and button into his pouch and pulls out another brace of knives. Todoroki throws them high, letting Aizawa dodge and momentarily take his eyes off him.

It isn't a long enough time to do any real damage with his Quirk, but Todoroki can slide his other Ka-Bar out and charge forward.

He slices through the fabric of Aizawa's sleeve before the man pulls away. Todoroki flips his knife around in his hands, repositioning the blade so it lies against the length of his forearms. There is a thin line of blood on the first quarter of metal before the serrated teeth of the knife start.

Aizawa tugs on the end of the scarf Todoroki has in his fist. Todoroki tenses in preparation for an attack, but Aizawa does not try to heave him off his feet like he expected. Instead the man sweeps a leg out and catches Todoroki hard in the thigh.

He stumbles and this time, Aizawa presses into his guard. The man lands a punch against his ribs as Todoroki tries to spin away and overcommits. He follows it up with a hard jab to the neck and Todoroki chokes.

Todoroki almost falls on his ass. At the last moment he jerks his shoulders so he falls onto his side and can roll with his momentum. The material of capture weapon snags around his ankle and Todoroki can only barely kick out to unloop it before Aizawa yanks on the length.

He can't breath. His lungs are working perfectly but that perfect hit to his trachea has choked him. There is a slight ringing in his head from smacking against the concrete and sparks in his vision from pain and his power thrums through him again as the man blinks. Kakashi uses the rest of his roll to get back onto a knee and reaches a hand down to the ground and uses his other to steady his wrist and grounds himself to the cement and pushes the humming in his veins towards his clawed fingers and-

Forgets.

He tries to pull lightening into his palm and freezes when he can't and freezes when he can't move and freezes when he doesn't recognize where he is. His breath wheezes through his clenched teeth and there's a man with red, red eyes sprinting towards him and Kakashi has dropped his knife and that's one of the only things he remembers his father telling him, "you can never drop your weapon" and the chakra in his pathways is not there and-

A boot snaps out and he feels his spine collide against the low brick wall of someone's garden. The scarf he wrapped around his right arm has fallen off, the end is only secured by the knot around his wrist. The other end of the capture weapon has pinned his left arm to his side and winds around both of his shins, tangling with the laces of his boots. He coughs and the pain fades from his throat and he can finally breathe again.

"Todoroki."

He is confused for a second. Then realization hits harder than Aizawa's foot into his chest.

He fucked up.

He really fucked up.

He must make a noise because Aizawa crouches down in front of him. "Todoroki," he says again.

"Yo," Todoroki strangles out. His chest is shaking with his inhalations and everything feels like it's vaguely unreal. Like the world has shifted one degree and the entirety of time itself has buffered for a millisecond and his thoughts are too far ahead at the same time they have not caught up yet.

"You okay?"

He nods yes. He really isn't, but that's nothing new.

"Your strategy was good, but your position as offense made it easy for me to dismantle your plan. As long as I took you out, I win."

Aizawa's voice is nice. It doesn't have the same cadence as Present Mic's, but it's low and scratchy and Todoroki can breathe in time to his pauses. Aizawa stands up and digs into his utility belt. As he examines a handful of caltrops, Todoroki shifts his right hand behind his torso. The bind around it prevents him from moving his wrist or reaching further than midway across his body.

“It wasn’t ju-” he coughs half way through his sentence as something catches in his throat. Aizawa raises an eyebrow and bends down to spread out caltrops.

“What was that?”

“It wasn’t just me.” There’s a muffled pop as Todoroki pulls his thumb out of its socket. His hand flashes across his body as he pulls it from where it was pinned and digs into his pouch. A blade slices across the side of his fingers but he gets a grip around what he was looking for.

Aizawa recoils before pausing and staring as Todoroki pulls out a bright red Russian matryoshka doll. “What?” He asks with an unimpressed voice.

“She helped,” Todoroki says and snaps the head of the doll off. He closes his eye as the flash bang goes off, but the explosion of light is still enough to burn through his eyelid.

The quiet warmth of his Quirk returns and Todoroki encases where he thinks Aizawa is in ice. Minutes later, he finally blinks the spots out of his eye. Todoroki looks up to find Aizawa slumped against the telephone pole, frozen up to his neck. His eyes are pressed shut and his mouth is in a grimace.

Todoroki pulls the manacles out of his pouch and is about to cuff Aizawa when the bell chimes for the passed exam. Yaoyorozu must have made it through the gate, he thinks as he unfreezes Aizawa.

He takes a step back. Aizawa reaches his hands up and presses them into his eyes. Todoroki sits down against the wall he was thrown against and watches Aizawa pull out a container of eye drops.

Todoroki counts seconds in time to his breaths. He needs the calm down. The adrenaline of the fight and the sudden flashback has made him twitchy. If Aizawa notices it-

Todoroki doesn't actually know what Aizawa would do. Probably tell someone, but who? Would he ask Todoroki to get help again? Sometimes he wishes people would just-

He stops that train of thought. His eye closes as he measures his inhalations. Seven in, hold for seven, seven out. An unlucky number for anything except holding anxiety at bay.

"Todoroki," Aizawa says.

He opens his eye and glances up. Aizawa has moved, has stood up and gathered his caltrops and Todoroki did not even notice. There's blood still rushing in his ears and that same sense of a broken timeline making all his thoughts fuzz around the edges.

He's tired, he realizes. He doesn't even want to run off his stress at this point. All he wants to do is go back to his dorm room and wedge himself into the corner of his closet and sleep. He just wants to close his eye and not have to worry about opening it.

Aizawa reaches out a hand and Todoroki remembers that he is still on the ground. He takes it and allows his teacher to pull him up. It's a bit awkward, with the scarf pinning his left arm to his side and his right thumb swelling, but they manage. Todoroki gets his feet underneath them and does not sway with exhaustion.

"Shit, don't-" Aizawa starts to say as Todoroki maneuvers his thumb

back into its socket. It pops in easily and Todoroki makes a fist, moving his fingers to see how they feel. It's painful, but not serious.

"Let me see," Aizawa examines his thumb before sighing. "It's fine, but don't do that again. You can tear your ligaments. Just... wait next time."

Todoroki nods. Sometimes he has to pause and remember not everyone learned how to escape handcuffs before the age of ten.

Time blurs a bit. He blinks again and he is returning his thrown knives to his pouch, his dropped Ka-Bars already in their sheathes. Aizawa is waiting for him to finish. Together they walk to the gate.

Yaoyorozu is flushed with victory. She beams at Todoroki and even if he's worn down to the bone, he smiles with his visible eye and lets her compliment his plan.

Aizawa is gruff and seemingly uncaring as they board the bus, but he praises both of them on their victory. More so Yaoyorozu, but Todoroki understands. She needs it more than he does. She's a self-conscious teenager and he's... him.

He is self-assured. He knows how to study, and strategize, and adjust himself to work with others. He is earning perfect grades and exercising regularly and reconnecting with his sister and meeting with his friends and gathering information on villains and maintaining a shadowy empire of morally-grey contacts and doing the work of college students as a side job. The pressure is building and he keeps committing himself but he will not falter.

There are bags under his eyes and stress lines appearing between his eyebrows. He knows his capacity and doesn't ask for

acknowledgement and he is going to be fine.

He is forty-five and fifteen and not quite an adult in the way he manages himself. He is working on it and falling apart a bit but he will get there eventually. He just needs to finish his work. It will take time and there will be many more sleepless nights but what he is doing comes before him. The end result of his machinations is more than worth the prematurely grey hairs no one will be able to find in the white mane of hair on his head.

Todoroki nods along to Yaoyorozu and Aizawa's conversation. He unbuckles his plate armor and eases it over his head. He has to lean forward to get it off and the armrest of the bus seat digs into his back. After he deposits it into the seat next to him, he reaches a hand under his shirt to press at the bruises Aizawa left.

They ache slightly to the touch, but nothing feels broken. He turns back to the conversation to find Yaoyorozu staring at him.

"Are you alright, Todoroki?"

He nods and works off his gloves. They get tossed on top of the armor and Todoroki leans back against the window with a low exhalation. Yaoyorozu's and Aizawa's voices wash over his head in time to the rumble of the bus. He is not about to fall asleep, but he feels rattled and tired enough to tune out and let his eye shutter half-closed.

Recovery Girl is visibly worried when they arrive at the field tent she has set up. Todoroki sets his plate armor, gloves, and pouch on a chair and starts stripping off his shirt and undershirt. There's a noise behind him and Todoroki turns to see Yaoyorozu hastily look away to the screens Recovery Girl has set up.

He throws his shirt on top of the pile of the other pieces of his costume and sits on one of the beds to wait for Recovery Girl. She walks over to him and immediately presses two fingers into the red mark swelling over his sternum. He grits his teeth as she grabs his hand.

“What happened to your thumb? Let me get you an ice pack for that swelling. We are going to have to give you a nickname if you keep breaking your hands like this.”

“Yes ma’am.”

She motions for him to show her his side.

“Aizawa, did you have to punch him in the ribs? I just fixed those.” Recovery Girl purses her lips and frowns. “You’re much too skinny, young man. Do I have to do another blood panel?”

Todoroki shakes his head no. “I’ve been eating the same.”

He has, but he probably should have increased his intake to factor in for stress. Even losing a couple pounds is visible on his lean frame.

He turns pointedly towards Yaoyorozu, who is watching one of the matches, and looks back at Recovery Girl. Hopefully the presence of his classmate will prevent her from examining him further.

She returns his gaze with flinty eyes and checks the shoulder Hero Killer sliced through. “Any shortness of breath or pain? Lingering soreness, stiffness, or sudden weakness in your shoulder?”

“No.”

“Okay honey, it doesn’t look like there’s anything worse than bruising. If there is more swelling over your ribs or sternum or you start hurting while breathing, let me know. As for that thumb, keep icing it and come to me if the pain gets worse.”

She turns to Aizawa, who has sat down in the bed across from Todoroki. He rolls his sleeve up and lets Recovery Girl wipe antiseptic over the cut on his arm. “Do you feel dizzy, have blurred vision, or feel sensitive to light or noise?”

They run down a list of concussion questions and Recovery Girl has Aizawa repeat strings of numbers backwards. Todoroki turns to the monitors.

Present Mic is yelling into a forest in one screen. There is no audio, but whenever he opens his mouth the intensity of his screams chase animals out of the foliage. Another monitor shows flashes of light against a fog. The smoke starts to dissipate and Snipe appears, reloading his revolver as he paces forward. In the middle of the wall of screens, anger-issues and Midoriya walk through a city.

Todoroki watches anger-issues punch Midoriya in the face. Something burns inside his chest as Midoriya hits the ground. He doesn’t have a place to stand and talk about hero behavior without looking hypocritical, but Todoroki wishes someone would say something. He glances towards Aizawa and sees the man staring at the same screen with a frown.

The four of them watch All Might arrive in a whirlwind of destruction. Yaoyorozu’s hands have tangled in front of her chest and she is wide-

eyed at the viciousness of the battle. Todoroki stands when Midoriya and anger-issues crash into each other.

He would fail that team, he realizes. Or at least, he would fail anger-issues. Bakugou. He doesn't really care at this point. He made a mistake once and witnessed a team tear itself apart with inferiority complexes and he did nothing.

Todoroki is actually lucky when he thinks about it. With his teaching, he should have lost all three. The fact that only one defected is a miracle. That the other two still cared for him as a person and took the time to visit him is a mystery.

He pulls on his undershirt and picks up his gear. On the screen, Midoriya and Bakugou collide again and Yaoyorozu winces. There is no way the teachers did not know about the tension between the two. It's apparent in every interaction they have. That's one of the reasons why he was so taken aback at the concern shown to Endeavor's behavior. Maybe he was pulled aside because he actually talked to someone about his circumstances. Maybe that's why no one interfered for Midoriya, because he didn't bring his issues to an adult.

Midoriya's behavior speaks for itself, though. He is too heroic and too scared in turns. He ducks down, makes himself smaller whenever Bakugou gets near. He wears a name that means 'worthless' and flinches at loud noises. Someone should have noticed.

He is almost to the flaps of the tent when Recovery Girl calls out to him. "Wait just a second, young man."

She reaches into her coat and pulls out a small pill bottle. It says 'CHERRY FLAVORED' in large kanji with a comic depiction of a blushing fruit. She hands it to him.

“Even if you had broken bones, I would not heal it. You are far too exhausted for me to use my Quirk. Take one of these thirty minutes before bed and try to get at least eight hours of sleep a night.”

Todoroki takes the bottle. A sticker on the cap denotes it as Melatonin. He puts it in his weapon's pouch and makes a mental note to toss it in a drawer and forget about it. He'll make an effort of course, but only hard narcotics have worked in the past to make him sleep.

When he enters the changing room, Aoyama is the only one in there. He nods to the other boy and opens his locker. Todoroki strips out of his undershirt and pants and tosses them into his laundry basket with his Kevlar shirt. He changes into his uniform pants but leaves his shirt off.

“Aoyama,” he says as he carries his laundry basket to the shelf the cleaning staff pick them up from. The other boy looks up.

“Oui?”

Todoroki crosses the room to where the short kid found the hole between the changing rooms. He peels the poster off the wall.

“Todoroki?”

He presses his left hand against the hole and lets fire burst to life over his arm. The wall is concrete, most likely made of Portland cement, with a thicker barrier of reinforced concrete five inches deep. Everything in U.A. is built dense to mitigate villain attacks.

Todoroki breathes out and increases the temperature of his flames. Ice crystals form across the right side of his chest as he tries to keep his body cool. The fire flickers and darkens, cherry red flames shifting to clear orange.

He sets his teeth and concentrates. The orange flickers dark before is suddenly lightens. Todoroki pushes his palm harder into the wall and the flames finally flash a bright white.

Portland cement is composed of limestone, aluminosilicates, and a small amount of calcium sulfate. It's combined with gravel, sand, and water to form concrete.

Concrete does not have a melting point. Cement has a fusion point at $1,450^{\circ}\text{C}$ while silicates can melt at $1,200^{\circ}\text{C}$. If there is enough oxygen in the room to fuel the fire, Todoroki can hit $1,500^{\circ}\text{C}$. It will most likely be enough to seal the wall, but it won't be pretty.

"Open the door," he tells Aoyama. The room is starting to heat with the intensity of the flames writhing around Todoroki's hand.

He focuses on his fire again and pushes past bright white into blinding. Something under his palm gives and Todoroki pulls his fingers down the wall, through the concrete, and over the hole. When he steps back, there is an imprint of his palm with a warp in the middle where the hole has closed.

He shakes the warmth from his arm and lets ice crawl over his left. Aoyama comes to hover by his side and stare at where the hole was. "Help me look for more?" Todoroki asks.

"Oui, mon ami!" Aoyama's grin is brilliant.

They uncover four more holes hidden behind posters. Todoroki starts to flag on the third and needs two tries to close the fourth. Iida and Ojiro walk in to see Todoroki press his forehead against the side of a locker as he shoves his palm into the wall. His fire flickers to orange intermittently and sweat drips down his back.

“Todoroki, what are you-”

Finally his hand cuts into the wall like its melting butter. He seals the opening and steps back, breathing hard. The sweat tracks freeze to his skin and pull oddly as he grabs for his shirt.

He accepts a hi-five from Aoyama and pulls on his shirt. He leaves his dress shirt unbuttoned and drapes his tie over his shoulders before grabbing his blazer.

Todoroki pushes past Iida's broad chest to shut his locker. “I'm heading out,” he tells Aoyama. Ojiro waves as he walks out the open door.

“Did he just-”

“We should probably stick the posters back onto the wall. I don't think sensei would be happy if he saw that.”

“But-”

“That's an excellent idea, monsieur!”

Todoroki is thankfully out of hearing range before Iida finally strings a sentence together.

He makes it to his dorm and is only able to shower and pull on a clean pair of boxers before he passes out.

Chapter End Notes

From: Kouda Kouji

[4 Images Attached](#)

Todoroki, looking at his tired, grungy, unshaven homeroom teacher: Ah, there he is. The man who has his life together. I aspire to come anywhere near him in terms of maturity. He is a real hero among men.

On that note, Aizawa was right about the dislocated thumb. Please don't try that at home. If you severely dislocate your thumb don't try to fix it yourself if you don't know what you're doing. Seek medical help.

Also, you probably shouldn't try to melt concrete. I know Endeavor could, but all the forms I read say concrete spalls under intense heat. These were 9/11 conspiracy forms though, so take this with a grain of salt. And there could be chemical fumes.

Next chapter will be up on Wednesday the 11th. There will be a minor intervention, reptiles, Fuyumi, and Shouji trying on some premium fits. I'll see you then!

Family

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Todoroki has good days sometimes.

They are not rare, or at least his levels for what is acceptable are a bit skewed. Getting six hours of sleep and having to finish a video essay in a day because he was busy coordinating surveillance efforts on the rapidly emerging Reservoir Dogs gang? Not optimal but ordinary. Realizing his meeting with Aizawa will be more about the Hero Killer Incident than his detention essays? He would rather not but it's fine.

Today has certainly started as one of the days that are so pleasantly above average that he doesn't feel compelled to stop and savor it. He doesn't focus on enjoying it, only on the slow dissipation of tension in his shoulders.

He falls asleep on Thursday at six p.m. and sleeps for a full ten hours without any interruptions. It's incredible. Todoroki's entire body feels light, his head clear, and the streaks of grey clouds through the dark blue sky are only filled with opportunity.

Todoroki wakes up at four and blinks lazily into the darkness of his room. He is sore from yesterday's activity. When he sits up and adjusts his mask, the bruises on his skin ache.

And that's nice, in a way. The fight went badly, with the flashback and the exhaustion and all the consequences, but now all he's left with are purple blotches and a twinge in his thumb. It feels like catharsis in a way. Like he has choked out all the tar of stress running in his veins. It feels like he has snapped back into his body and he is no longer drifting half out of his skull under the pressure.

Todoroki relaxes against the wall by his futon. His blankets pool in his lap and the shadows on the ceiling shift as the tree by his window sways in the wind. It's so calm it drags on him, centering him in his bones and in his room and in this mindset of peace.

He gets up after a moment and grabs his phone. A handful of notifications greet him. Giran's quiet, which could be good or bad. Honcho passed his finals. Dronehead has footage of a villain vlogger or something robbing a convenience store. Fuyumi sent him directions to her apartment.

Most importantly, his podcast has updated. Todoroki puts in his earbuds and starts the episode on training detection dogs.

He putters around his dorm room, making his bed and starting to pack for summer break. A cup with a small white ring of left over milk in the inside is stacked on top of his plate from yesterday's dinner. Todoroki lifts the picture of Present Mic that Hagakure taped onto his wall to look at his meal chart. He walks out into the hallway with his dishes in one hand and his basket of laundry balanced against his hip.

No one is in the kitchen when he enters. Todoroki sets his plate and cup in the sink. The third-year with the scales put soap in the dishwasher instead of detergent and now has to clean the whole dorm's dishes for a month. Inui had not been happy about getting a call at eleven at night because the kitchen was flooded with bubbles.

Murakami is lounging against the dryer in the basement when Todoroki walks in. She looks up at him but doesn't say anything, instead going back to stitching a hole shut in a pair of pants. Todoroki loads his laundry into the washer and takes a minute to stretch out a cramp in his calf.

The podcast moves onto the use of detection dogs in wildlife research. Murakami hums the refrain to a song Fuyumi used to sing. Todoroki checks his emails. The washer thumps loudly in the cold basement.

When his clothes have been moved to the dryer, it's almost five. Todoroki retreats back to the kitchen to make breakfast. A second-year support student stumbles down the stairs when the rice cooker clicks from 'cook' to 'keep warm'. He opens it and stares blearily through the steam.

"Couscous again?" The support student's voice is full of disappointment.

Todoroki makes a noise of affirmation, not looking up from his phone. Shark has sent him the footage from his restaurant. A man with a facemask and a crisp suit is eating with an entourage of bodyguards. The header of the email reads, 'fuckers didn't tip.'

The support student grunts and grabs an energy bar. Todoroki takes his eggs off the heat and spoons them into a bowl with the couscous. His fingers are tacky from the grapefruit he had. When the student finally heads out to the labs, Todoroki lifts the bottom of his mask up and starts eating. The voice of the podcaster is deep and rough, but it noticeably picks up when the episode moves past legislation and registration and onto actual training. It's why he likes this channel so much. The man's love is apparent.

By the time eight rolls around, Todoroki has a solid plan put together to shut down the vlogging villain, an analysis on the strange dip in petty crime in Kamino written up, a bribe sent to a Council member campaigning for funding cuts to police and raises for heroes, and the beginnings of a solution to the Quirk disruption drug.

Todoroki measures the rest of his couscous out into pre-proportioned

Tupperware and sets it in his corner of the fridge. He makes a mental note to remove it after his meeting with Aizawa, as he and the other students have to leave for summer break.

Murakami is gone when he returns to the basement to get his clean clothes. He leaves the unfolded pile on top of his bed, next to his half filled suitcase. When he looks into the mirror to tie his tie, the bruising under his visible eye has faded some. Todoroki adjusts the strap of his eye patch, grabs his backpack, and heads out the door.

It's a half-day but when he enters 1-A's homeroom, the mood is tangibly subdued. Mina, Kaminari, Kirishima, and Satou form a circle of misery while everyone else awkwardly clusters around and offers encouragement.

'I'll tell you all about it,' Kouda signs to Satou. 'I'll take pictures too.'

"Thanks, buddy." Satou sighs. "It was totally my fault anyway, I should have thought of a plan or something."

"We'll miss you," Shouji says. He nudges Tokoyami. The smaller boy glares at him but passes Satou his phone.

"I made you a playlist. I am aware of your poor taste and sought to work arou-"

Shouji nudges Tokoyami again.

"I mean, this is for you. Hopefully it will be soothing after both your loss and the cacophonous wails of despair that echo from your Spoti-"

“Thank you, Tokoyami,” Satou manages a grin. Kouda is laughing next to him. Shouji runs a hand over his face but the shadow of a smile is visible under his facemask.

Todoroki pats Satou on the back and listens as he reads aloud what’s on the playlist. Todoroki only recognizes three out of the fifty odd songs. And he only remembers those because Tokoyami played them for him before, in the darkness of his room, while Dark Shadow warbled along. It was apparently the natural ambience needed to appreciate industrial noise hip hop.

Aizawa slams the door open at exactly the moment the bell begins to ring. Everyone hurries to their seats as he walks to the podium.

“Morning. About your finals, we had some failures.”

Satou, Kaminari, Kirishima, and Mina visibly shrink into themselves.

“As such,” Aizawa lets a pause stretch out. Todoroki looks away from the front so Aizawa will not see the smile curling his eye into a crescent. He wishes he thought of such interesting techniques to use against his students.

“You’re all going to summer training camp.”

Mina screams. Kouda spins around in his seat and high-fives Satou with both hands. Kirishima breaks into tears.

Aizawa announces the logical ruse and the supplemental training. The

noise in the room ramps up as Iida protests and everyone starts discussing what will happen at camp.

For the next two hours of extended homeroom, they go over the packing list and meeting times. Todoroki reads under his desk with barely an ear on the lecture about not revealing the camp location. When the bell rings again, Todoroki stays back. He hears Hagakure propose a shopping trip as he walks to Aizawa's desk.

Aizawa takes his time organizing his supplies in his messenger bag. Todoroki gets a glimpse of the man's handwriting and is surprised to find it impossibly neat. Each pen stroke is uniform in weight and thickness. Even on the label for a notebook marked 'LESSON PLANS', where there are no lines to keep text even, the title is straight to the point Todoroki wonders if Aizawa printed it.

When the noise outside the classroom has ebbed into silence, Aizawa slides his computer into his bag and stands. He motions Todoroki through the door and pulls out his ring of keys to lock up.

"You like cats?" He asks when he finally turns to face Todoroki.

Todoroki blinks. That was a complete non sequitur.

"No." He really doesn't. He can stand them, sure, but he will never go out of his way to see one. They are a study in chaos and extremes and Todoroki frankly prefers the predictable, overly-affectionate behavior of dogs any day. "I'm allergic."

Aizawa frowns. They walk down the hallway to the main entrance of U.A. in silence. It's a bit painful.

“What do you like?”

“Dogs.”

Todoroki is pretty sure Aizawa shudders at this. Offense rises up and dies in his chest. He still respects the man, despite his poor taste. No need getting pissy over an opinion that's completely justified and doesn't hurt anyone. Even though it's wrong.

“Besides that.” Aizawa shoulders the double doors open. The sun is warm against Todoroki's mask. A breeze sweeps his hair over his eye and he reaches up to tug at it. It's getting long again.

He thinks. There are a lot of things he enjoys, such as new knives and the rush of success and satisfaction of puzzling out a complicated issue. There are even superfluous things he makes time for, like his trashy books and the aloe plant taking over his balcony and lying in a patch of sunlight on lazy days while blasting Creedence Clearwater through his headphones.

Aizawa's talking about animals though, for some unknown reason. Todoroki's smart enough to know what he means and Aizawa is smart enough to know that he knows. And while Todoroki could hem and haw like he usually does when people start asking questions for no reason, he won't.

They are built from the same cloth. Aizawa does not cut his words off for other's feelings. The pillars holding up his personality are built of logic and reason and vicious rationality. He's not cruel, no, but he hates to trip over extraneous bullshit that other people seem to drape over themselves like protective bubble wrap.

He's not mean, but he's unkind and awkward in ways that Todoroki

can appreciate. He knows himself and knows his capability and protects what he cares about. While Todoroki does not completely trust him (which is not an insult, Todoroki does not trust most things), he respects him.

They are at the U.A. arch. Todoroki thinks and the answer almost comes too easily.

“Turtles.”

Aizawa scratches his stubble and sighs and pulls out his phone. He types something out. A thick lock of his dark hair falls from its precarious position behind his ear to cover his eyes.

“Alright,” he says and turns to the train station.

The platform is busy when they arrive. Todoroki doesn't like crowds, but a lot of people in his profession didn't. They were too personal at the same time as they were distant, cramming people into one mass and removing their identity. It was wonderful for infiltration and an absolute bitch for guarding and guerilla encounters and he could never quite remove them from his work mentality. As such, he avoided them.

When he does have to act like a functioning member of society, he knows how to compartmentalize his past experiences to cope and slouch against the involuntary stiffening in his spine when people bumped into him. He sticks close to Aizawa, measuring the acceptable distance to maintain to rest on that border between 'not wanting to get lost' and 'clingy'.

If Aizawa notices, he doesn't say anything. Instead, when Todoroki removes his wrinkled, almost completely used punch card from his

pocket, Aizawa asks if he needs another one.

“Probably,” Todoroki says. They have five minutes until the next train comes in and Todoroki isn’t even sure if that’s the one they are riding on. Aizawa hasn’t given him any clue as to where they are going.

He starts walking to the machine when Aizawa speaks up again.

“You need money?”

Todoroki turns to stare at him. “No?”

Aizawa raises an eyebrow and turns back to his phone. Todoroki contemplates why he would offer as he uncomfortably maneuvers through the people lined up along the rails. When he returns, Aizawa makes a vague movement that Todoroki interprets as ‘Our train is the next one.’

The train pulls up with a hiss and Todoroki lets the conductor take his old punch card to throw away. Aizawa chooses a seat close to the corner of the car they are in and slumps against the grimy window. Todoroki checks his inbox to find twenty more emails requesting his response in various levels of urgency.

“If you need funds, U.A. has an allowance system.”

The statement is as disjointed as all the previous ones have been. Todoroki stares at his teacher. He has no idea why the man is continuing this thread of conversation.

“I have money.”

Aizawa just looks at him. “Your dad?”

Todoroki shakes his head and attempts to go back to his emails. Aizawa taps the table between them.

“I have a job,” Todoroki acquiesces.

Aizawa doesn’t appear to budge. In fact, he looks even more questioning. “A job,” he repeats.

“Tutoring.”

Aizawa’s mouth pulls down into a vaguely displeased look. His jaw clenches as he leans back against his seat and crosses his arms. “While I commend you on your resourcefulness, you have to know that’s illegal on multiple levels, Todoroki. You can’t make money off your peers-”

“I’m not.”

Aizawa’s eyebrow lifts even higher. “Not what.” His expression has shifted into annoyance.

Todoroki understands. This conversation is a lot like pulling teeth. He exhales through his nose. It grates upon him to reveal anything more than what people absolutely need to know.

It's more of a list of bullet points when he finally speaks. "I'm tutoring college students. Eighteen years and older. I have earned more than the unearned income and standard personal exemption amounts for the past three years. I file tax and information returns under self-employment guidelines. I pay SE and income tax. My bank checks over my finances and can confirm this."

He, of course, *adjusts* some of his paychecks and expenses. Not enough to trip any alarms, as he is a professional. The money that flows through his overseas accounts would be a bit too alarming for the government to just accept at face value.

Aizawa puts his head in his hands. He slowly drags his fingers from his hair down his face. Todoroki can see the red shine of blood vessels on his sclera when Aizawa's movement pulls at his bottom eyelids. "Okay," he says and it sounds pained.

Todoroki goes back to his emails. Aizawa closes his eyes and sinks even further into his seat.

"What classes?" Aizawa asks.

"Macroeconomic theory, Probability and Statistics, Developmental Psychology, Data Analysis, Russian, and Eastern European History." Todoroki has found that feeding people information in pieces is only really viable if those people work underneath you. As Aizawa's student, he cannot withhold easily attainable information without the risk of discovery and punishment.

Aizawa's only response is the deepening of the lines in his forehead. They don't speak for the rest of the trip.

Twenty minutes later, they get off at the Edado station. Todoroki checks the class group chat and sends a message that he will not be able to come to tomorrow's outing. Fuyumi has been planning their brunch meeting for almost two months now and she is clearly anxious about it.

Aizawa glances at his own phone as they turn off the main street. Todoroki can see a blue line tracing their route on his teacher's screen. The shrubbery in front of buildings grows more intricate and wild as they continue. Ten minutes into their journey, trees from dirt plots in the sidewalk tower above their heads. Todoroki sneezes as a plum blossom falls onto his face and leaves a streak of pollen across his mask.

They stop in front of a two-story house with flowerpots lined up under a menu. The wide window looking into the restaurant is decorated with stylized pictures of lizards and Todoroki can see tables and countless planters bristling with greenery through it.

A sign above the door reads "Edado Reptile Café" in rounded Kanji. They both stand uncomfortably in front of the entrance.

Todoroki looks at Aizawa. Aizawa stares at the chalkboard menu propped against the building.

Aizawa's trying, he realizes. And, and it's—something. Nice? Pleasant to discover that someone cares enough to put themselves in a decidedly awkward situation for him? Todoroki doesn't understand it completely but he can appreciate the sentiment at a distance.

He steps forward and breaks their standoff. There is a string of bells hooked over the top of the door and they chime when he walks in. Aizawa catches the door behind him and closes it slowly.

The café is almost empty. Todoroki takes a second to look around. The walls are lined with glass cases that have hinged screens on the front. They are filled with winding branches and ferns that spread from the ceilings of the cases to the ground. In the corner is what looks like a playpen lined with astroterf and potted plants. A couple is crouched down beside it to feed an iguana lettuce.

A waitress looks up from the front counter when she hears the bell ring. Small horns grow from her cheekbones and where her eyebrows should be. A snake is slowly winding around her neck. It tries to tunnel under her collar and she reaches down to redirect it with the easy movement of someone who does this multiple times a day.

“Table for two?” She asks as she reaches for a stack of menus. Todoroki steps to the side to defer to Aizawa. He nods.

“Any preference? We have leopard geckos and snakes for the tables down here. Our other iguanas besides Lulu,” she points to where the couple has moved to gently petting the lizard’s head, “are touring a school right now. Tortoises are upstairs.”

Aizawa shifts from one foot to the other. There’s a beat of silence before Todoroki realizes that the man is letting him decide. “Tortoises.”

The waitress smiles and leads them upstairs. At the top of the stairs, she opens a child gate. When they step through, they are greeted by almost fifteen tortoises of varying sizes that apparently have free reign of the second floor.

They pick a table near a large, stained-glass window at the back of the room. The waitress puts down their menus, and after a brief quiz on

reptile handling that Todoroki aces and Aizawa waves off, picks up a small Indian Star tortoise and places it in Todoroki's lap. It immediately burrows into his left side and falls asleep.

The waitress leaves and comes back with two waters and a bowl of turnip greens. She takes their orders before retreating to the first floor. Todoroki takes a green and presents it to the tortoise. It stays asleep. He puts the green back in the bowl and instead reaches for his water.

When Aizawa turns to survey the room, Todoroki drains half the cup. He sets it down with a clink. Aizawa faces him again, opens his mouth to speak, and stops when he sees the almost-empty glass. He looks at Todoroki with unimpressed eyes. Todoroki smirks under his mask.

"You know what this is about," Aizawa finally says. He takes a sip from his own glass.

Todoroki shrugs and debates petting the tortoise. It looks too comfortable for him to bother it, so he decides not to.

"Todoroki." Aizawa puts his cup down and slouches in his chair.

"The structural integrity of the locker rooms?" Todoroki tries.

"What? No." Aizawa pauses. "What happened to the locker rooms?"

"Someone was putting holes in them."

"Those walls are a foot thick of concrete. A few holes shouldn't have

done anything.”

Todoroki’s fingers itch for his phone. “There might have been a fire.”

Aizawa looks physically pained. “What did you kids do?”

He hums like he doesn’t know and offers another turnip green to the tortoise. It wakes up to accept this one and munches on it happily.

Aizawa runs his fingers through his hair and grimaces when they snag on knots. “This is about Hero Killer.”

“Ah,” Todoroki says. He debates trying to change the subject or talk his way around this topic. Aizawa’s bored stare does not waver. Todoroki feels transparent under that gaze. “That.”

“Yes. That.”

“I didn’t break the law.”

“And I’m very impressed.”

“But?”

“I’m very impressed with you *and* I’m curious about your rationale. Let’s save the inevitable disappointment I’ll feel until after you’re done explaining your actions.” Aizawa finishes his water and tips the glass back so an ice cube falls into his mouth. He crunches it between his

front teeth.

Todoroki hides a shudder. That was a power move if he had ever seen one.

The waitress brings their food: a bowl of cream stew with turtle shaped crackers swimming in it for Todoroki and a slice of cheesecake for Aizawa. They sit in silence as she serves them. When she walks back down the stairs, weaving between the tortoises with ease, Aizawa speaks up.

“Your fight with Hero Killer showed your confidence in your skills, your proficiency in hand-to-hand combat, and your knowledge of the laws surrounding Quirk use and hero work. However,” Aizawa cuts the point of cheesecake off and eats it, “your poor judgment should lead to your expulsion.”

Todoroki raises his eyebrow. He does not touch the soup in front of him.

“You didn’t do anything illegal, sure. But I don’t keep people in my class on technicalities. Your actions, while commendable, come across as arrogant, uncontrollable, and suicidal. The fact that you were obviously more concerned about the consequences of using your Quirk than *dying* makes those around you uncomfortable. You woke up after hours of surgery spent trying to drain blood from your lungs and one of your first actions was to make sure the police knew you didn’t break the law.”

Todoroki grits his teeth behind his mask and says nothing. Bitter anger flares in his chest and he stomps it down. Aizawa is his superior and someone he respects, even if it feels resentful right now. He will not talk back to his teacher, he will not throw a tantrum, he will not act like an obnoxious teenager. He is older than the man in front of

him, even if he is not as put together. He will act his fucking age and not explode under the pressure of this and all the other bullshit he has to deal with.

Aizawa cuts off another forkful of cheesecake but does not eat it. Instead he seems content to absent-mindedly pulverize it on his plate. He meets Todoroki's eyes and does not look away. "So tell me what you were thinking."

Todoroki licks the back of his teeth in suppressed irritation and—and he thinks. He runs his tongue over his teeth again and realization hits him.

It's a like punch to the chest. Sometimes grief takes a while to catch up. He rationally knows that he is different in this world. His hair isn't as coarse, he doesn't have the mole on his chin, and he is going to be much taller than he ever was. It just aches somewhere deep in his bones when he remembers that he no longer has sharp dog-teeth like his father. His real father.

Sights are easier. The Sharingan preserved visual impressions. When he looks over the razor-edged memories carved into his skull, they are silent. He can see his hand wreathed in lightening stab through a man's chest. He cannot feel the numb-burn of static in his veins. He cannot hear the sound of a thousand birds screaming.

He can recall a thousand jutsu and the color of chakra embedded in the towering redwoods of Konoha. He remembers Obito's dying face and Rin's dying face and the bodies of Minato and Kushina and a hundred other small tragedies.

Fugaku's brother-in-law had taught him-as-Kakashi about the Sharingan. He remembers migraines and anti-rejection medication and a low voice telling him to breathe through the pain. He remembers

dozens of control exercises built for children that he practiced when he couldn't sleep. He remembered forced leave as he struggled to not bleed chakra all over the place.

He remembers being told that the propensity of Uchiha to psychosis is because they can never forget. Their eyes bloom during emotional toil and only open for combat and spin faster, faster, faster with bloodshed. He remembers the yellowed pages of the incident report recounting how Madara mourned for his brother as he plucked his eyes from his skull.

Todoroki-as-Kakashi remembers the advice he received to prevent this. For every fight the eye sees, give it a celebration. For every loss, give it a moment of happiness.

So Todoroki remembers the way Naruto had dimples when he grinned and the strands of Sakura's hair falling out of her headband as she decimated a mountain with a punch and Rin trying to fight a smile as he stumbled chakra-drained around her apartment and the way Pakkun paced in a circle before settling down to watch him train.

He remembers the droop of Bull's jowls as he slobbered on a tennis ball and Urushi and Shiba squabbling for premium napping territory against his side and Bisuke's ringed eyes staring him down during a card game and Akino's attempts to open the fridge and Uhei's advice on wrapping his ankles and Guruko's sarcastic comments on his love life.

He remembers the way Minato's face practically shown when they finally had time to wash the dust of war off. He remembers Kushina waving a spatula at him for trying to sneak a bite of her cooking. He remembers the tilt of Jiraya's signature on the front page of an Icha Icha and the flush to Tsunade's cheeks as she beat him in drinking contests and the way Inuzuku Tsume hands looked as she passed him dog treats during dull jounin meetings.

He remembers the way Gai's lips moved when he said, "Eternal rival!" and "I wish you would take better care of yourself, my friend" and "I know it's Hip and Cool to be lonely, but you can trust me."

(He remembers sitting with his back pressed to a tree, knowing that Gai was on the other side. He remembers dangling his hand by his side and watching Gai do the same and calculating the centimeters between their pinky fingers with his stolen eye. He remembers thinking about the amount of energy it would take to just hook their hands together, to feel Gai's calloused palm against his own, to know the warmth and safety his grip would provide.

He remembers knowing that no matter how close they were and no matter how much energy he had, he would never find the confidence to move.

But that's an old story. It's a play from another time that the audience never knew if it would end in tragedy or victory. And no one would know now.

It's alright, Todoroki-as-a-man-out-time consoles himself. He's gotten very good at these tragedies.)

"I wasn't thinking."

Aizawa looks at him with an amalgamation of emotion hidden under apathy and stubble.

Todoroki's teeth unclench. Breathe through it, he remembers. Take care of himself. Trust.

(He has trouble with the last one. It's not an insult to Aizawa. Todoroki does not trust most things.)

"I was... worried. The heroes around me were busy and I knew something was wrong. When I got to where Midoriya was I didn't have time to get a pro. I tried to make Midoriya leave with Iida and Native, but he insisted on staying."

Todoroki gives the tortoise another radish green to do something with his hands. He wishes he could pull his phone out and put in front of his face, have another mask to separate him even further from this conversation.

"I was reprimanded for killing—" he pauses. He is not supposed to know the Noumu was a man-made creature. He cannot say he killed an experiment. "—the Noumu at a school facility. If something similar had happened with Hero Killer, in public without pro-hero supervision and without the justification of self-defense..."

He trails off. The tortoise shoves its head against his hand, searching for another radish green. Steam is slowly rising off his untouched stew.

Todoroki picks up his water and feels the condensation clinging to the glass drip down his fingers. "I couldn't think of any alternatives to my actions."

Aizawa glances down at his cheesecake. Todoroki steals a sip of water. Aizawa looks up when he puts his cup down and Todoroki has enough emotional energy left to be vaguely thankful.

“Did you think you were going to win that fight?” Aizawa asks.

Todoroki doesn't waste time to think about his answer. “Yes.” He wouldn't enter a fight he had zero chances of surviving. If Hero Killer was more powerful or Todoroki had more restrictions, he would have tried to rescue Midoriya and Iida and leave.

He would feel guilty afterwards if Native died, but the man is a pro-hero. He signed up for the job and he has years of training for these situations. Midoriya and Iida are children.

Aizawa drops his fork on his plate with a clatter of metal on ceramic. He folds his arms over his chest and meets Todoroki's eyes. It's not a challenge, but it is doubt.

“Yes,” Todoroki repeats.

“And if you couldn't win?”

“I could and did.”

“But if you hadn't?”

“Counterfactual thinking is usually pointless in dangerous occupations because it leads to risk aversion.” The tortoise shoves against Todoroki's hand again and he gives it another radish green. “Making me feel guilt for what could have been does not lead to rational decision making; it leads to hesitation and poor mental health.”

Aizawa's eyebrows have risen high on his forehead. His mouth is a straight, terse line and his expression is dripping in incredulity.

Worse mental health, Todoroki amends to himself. He curls his eye into a smiling crescent and does not twitch as the silence drags.

Finally, Aizawa sighs. "I don't agree with your thinking. Thinking about how you could have messed up—or did mess up—makes you smarter for the next time."

They don't speak while Aizawa picks at cheesecake. When he looks out the stained-glass window at passerbys, Todoroki eats his soup. The turtle crackers have long since gone soggy but it's still good.

"Ok," Aizawa says. It's abrupt enough that Todoroki almost spills soup on himself.

"What?"

"Ok. I understand where you're coming from."

Todoroki stares.

"I'm honestly not the best person to talk to about this. You've seen me do something similar at the U.S.J., even if that was under different circumstances. I'm a pro and you're a child. You shouldn't have the skills, the mindset, or the experience to deal with that shit."

That Todoroki does have the skills is implied. If he was allowed to use

his Quirk, he could have easily defeated Hero Killer. They both know this. That he was able to beat Hero Killer just using hand-to-hand while making sure his allies were safe speaks of his talents.

Hero Killer murdered seventeen heroes. He put another twenty-three permanently out of commission. Todoroki escaped with a punctured lung and some bad cuts. If acceptance into the hero profession was entirely merit based, without any necessities for schooling, he would have been working under his father a long time ago.

“Plus,” Aizawa mutters into his water glass, “I would have done the same thing at your age. It’s hypocritical of me to be disappointed in you, so I’m not.”

“Oh,” Todoroki says. He was not anticipating this.

“I don’t keep people in my class on technicality but I don’t expel those with potential.” Aizawa cracks another ice cube between his teeth and chews. “You messed up, but you saved three people and prevented a murderer from killing more.”

The waitress brings them the check and Todoroki picks up the tortoise. He carries it over to where a group of its brothers are eating chunks of pumpkin under a heat lamp. While he pretends to pay attention to the tortoises, he watches Aizawa out of the corner of his eye.

As soon as Aizawa places a stack of cash in the bill folder, Todoroki stands and wanders back over. If he has to explain his actions, Aizawa can pay for his food.

They leave the restaurant and start walking towards the train station.

“Next time,” Aizawa tells him, “just use your Quirk. Of course, if there is a next time we are going to have another serious talk. I don’t want to interrupt breakfast to come visit you in the hospital again.”

Todoroki huffs a laugh under his breath. Aizawa turns to look at him.

“What? It’s the most important meal of the day.”

Todoroki tries to stifle his laughs but ends up snorting. His shoulders shake and his mouth twitches under his facemask as he fights with a grin.

They get to the train station and ride back to U.A. Todoroki scrolls through his notifications. His bribe to the Council member has been accepted. There are three more articles about the use of AntiBoard by vigilantes. Giran’s sent him a new packet of information to trawl through and Hagakure has taken it upon herself to spam him pictures of Present Mic’s shirtless photoshoots.

Todoroki unfortunately has a type. Hagakure unfortunately decided that part of his punishment for ending up in the hospital was an in depth analysis of his type. It started with traits he liked and devolved into a slideshow of pictures for him to ‘smash’ or ‘pass.’ He was swimming in morphine and distracted by plans and, well, his teacher has a lot of positive qualities.

He’s great at his job and works hard and runs charity events. He emotes wildly and talks loudly. He’s smart and full of energy and just is an all around good person, even if he is vicious at times. He listened to Todoroki and tried to help to the best of his ability.

That he reminds Todoroki of Gai does not help at all. He's still stuck in the past, has always had the problem of comparing people to each other and being surprised when they break the mold he has created. He has trouble letting go.

Todoroki knows that Present Mic is not Gai. They are two individuals that might share some characteristics, but it's unfair to both men if he treats them like they are interchangeable. He's working on it.

"Where are you staying for summer break?" Aizawa asks as they step off the train.

"With my sister," Todoroki replies. He expects Aizawa to leave him now but the man follows him up the hill to U.A.'s campus.

His teacher nods. Todoroki takes a right through the gate towards the student dorms. Aizawa pulls out his phone and starts texting someone. He seems content to trail a couple steps behind Todoroki.

Todoroki swipes his key card on the dorm's scanner and holds the door open for Aizawa. The living room is devoid of people. Todoroki can see that the second-year managed to do the dishes. Inui should be satisfied.

"Where does your sister live?"

"Outside Kamino." Todoroki opens the fridge and pulls out his collection of Tupperware. Someone has poached one of his servings of chicken and a papaya. He grimaces.

"My apartment's close by there," Aizawa says. He leans against the

back of the couch and watches Todoroki sort his food into an insulated lunch bag.

Todoroki hums. He doesn't understand why Aizawa is bringing this up. The man thinks either in straight, logical lines that Todoroki can track, or wild tangents that Todoroki doesn't even try to comprehend.

Aizawa doesn't follow as Todoroki walks up the stairs to his room. He stacks the rest of his clothes in his suitcase, makes sure he has all his chargers, and locks his door behind him. When he gets off the elevator at the common room, Aizawa is still there. It looks like he is slowly melting into the couch.

"I'll drive you over," Aizawa announces.

Todoroki jerks up from where he is adjusting the lunch bag's straps. "What?"

"It's the rational decision. I'm sure your sister doesn't want you to take the Kamino line alone at this time of day. Plus, if she has any questions about the trip I can talk to her in person."

Todoroki stares at his teacher. Aizawa looks back at him and raises an eyebrow.

The Kamino line isn't the nicest, and this is Todoroki's first time taking it, but he can take care of himself. Unless the League decides to launch another attack, there is no risk to his safety. He opens his mouth to tell Aizawa this, but closes it.

Maybe this is like the café. Is Aizawa trying to be nice? He already did

something for Todoroki and does not have a deficit to take care of. There is no reason for him to offer this. Todoroki frowns and tries to find some hidden motivation in his teacher's face.

Aizawa raises his eyebrow higher. He can't actually be worried about Todoroki taking the train. This must be something else.

Todoroki thinks. He can't follow the steps Aizawa took in this logical leap. But he also can't come up with any good reason to say no.

"Alright." He stretches the word to convey his confusion.

"Good. Mic is waiting for us in the parking lot."

Todoroki blanches. This must be some karmic retribution for his past deeds. He deliberately does not think of the twenty odd photos sitting unopened in his messages.

Aizawa pulls himself off the back of the couch with considerable effort. He tilts his head towards the door. Todoroki shoulders his backpack on, slings his lunch bag over his shoulder, and grabs his suitcase. The pass through the front door just as Inui approaches with a ring of keys.

"Did Suga do the dishes?" He asks.

Todoroki nods. He wracks his brain for the name of the third year who still has her piles of clothes cluttering the stairwell. Takahashi maybe? Or was it Tajirou?

“And did Takemi clean up her clothes?” Ah, that was her name.

Todoroki shakes his head. Inui growls and shoves the door with more force than necessary. Aizawa stares after him. “That’s not a job I envy,” he says before turning towards the parking lot.

Present Mic is sitting in bright silver, electric car with bumper stickers that fill up the back bumper and spread onto the bottom of the rear windshield. Todoroki can read one that says ‘I SCREAM FOR PRESENT MIC’ and another that simply states ‘PUNK ISN’T DEAD’. There is a stick family decal made up of two humans and four cats. It’s a chaotic mess and Present Mic is leaning out of the driver’s window waving wildly at them.

“Todoroki! Shouta! How was the café?”

“Fine,” Aizawa says. He opens the trunk of the car for Todoroki’s suitcase.

When Todoroki gets into the backseat, he sits behind the passenger seat. It’s for safety reasons, he tells himself. While most drivers swerve away from accidents to protect themselves, multiple studies show that heroes and parents try to angle themselves to take the brunt of the collision. It’s definitely not so he can see the corner of Present Mic’s mouth curl up when he smiles.

Aizawa takes the aux cord Mic hands him and tries to pass it back to Todoroki. He shakes his head. There is barely any music on his phone and he has already gone over his data limit for this month. Unless they want to listen to the four Rolling Stone songs he has downloaded on repeat, he is not going into be in charge of the aux.

Present Mic takes the aux back from Aizawa with an exaggerated, put

upon look and plugs it back into his phone. He scrolls through several pages of playlists before selecting an alternative song with a fast drumbeat and soft vocals.

“What music do you like, kiddo?” Mic turns around so he can back out of the parking space. It has the unfortunate side affect of placing Todoroki directly into his line of sight.

He tries to ignore the way Present Mic’s loose hair falls around his shoulders. It has been washed out of its stiff curve but some strands still cling together with tacky product. He has earrings and the edge of what looks like a tattoo curls over his collar.

This is it, Todoroki thinks. This is penance for his sins. He should never have made his team pay all those restaurant bills. Maybe if he showed up to meetings on time he wouldn’t have to witness the sheer glory of his English teacher’s tongue piercing.

“Sixties rock,” he says and tries to bury his face in his phone.

Present Mic takes his answer an opportunity to grill him on bands. When Todoroki admits he doesn’t listen to a lot of music, Mic pokes Aizawa in the side and stage whispers, “He’s just like you!”

Aizawa grunts and tries to go back to sleep. Mic keeps up their one-sided conversation all the way to Kamino. Todoroki learns that Present Mic and Aizawa live together, but if they are a couple or just roommates Todoroki cannot tell. They own four cats named Bean, Fish, Mustard, and Etsuko. Present Mic named the last one, because Aizawa’s sense of humor is terrible. By the time they arrive at Fuyumi’s apartment, Todoroki knows that Aizawa cannot drive, the names of twenty relatively famous rock bands Mic has interviewed, and how excited the man is for an upcoming fundraiser.

It's frankly overwhelming. Todoroki is out of his element enough that he does not question why Mic would park in front of the building or why both his teachers would walk him in. When they step off of the elevator on Fuyumi's floor, all Todoroki wants to do is nap.

Present Mic, who has taken it upon himself to carry Todoroki's suitcase, knocks on Fuyumi's door. Aizawa stands next to Todoroki and they both watch Mic bounce on the balls of his feet.

"I'm coming!" They hear a muffled voice call through the door. There's the sound of hurried footsteps and a metal click of the lock, and Fuyumi practically throws the door open.

"Shouto-" She stops when she sees Present Mic and Aizawa.

"Hey young listener!" Mic exclaims. Todoroki's suitcase hinders him slightly but his gestures are just as enthusiastic as ever. "I'm one of little Todoroki's teachers at U.A. We offered to drive him over!"

Fuyumi blinks at him. "Oh, um, okay." She holds the door open as an invitation to come in. "Do you want some tea?"

Present Mic nods and follows her to the kitchen, keeping up an endless string of questions that border the fine line between 'polite' and 'nosey'. He leaves Todoroki's suitcase by the front hallway.

Todoroki can hear Mic's voice still echoing off the walls of the small LDK. He turns to look at Aizawa. His teacher is slowly surveying the apartment with a blank face.

It's a standard design: a short hallway with one door on the left open to show a bedroom and one on the right Todoroki's assumes leads to a bathroom. The hallway ends at the living room with an open dining area and kitchen right next to it. The furniture is a mish-mash of cheap, mass-produced things and what Todoroki recognizes with a flash of humor as a set of chairs from their family's dining room.

He grabs the handle of his suitcase and heads towards the kitchen. The couch in the living room is pulled out and neatly made with one of the quilts Michio mailed over from college. Todoroki places his suitcase next to the pull-out and wanders into the kitchen.

Present Mic is sitting on one of the liberated chairs in the dining room with a wide smile on his face. It makes Todoroki pause. Something about it rings false, almost knife-like in a way. Todoroki looks from his teacher to where Fuyumi is explaining her job at the nursing home. Her voice is tinted with anxiety but her hands do not shake as she puts the kettle on.

Todoroki looks back to Aizawa, who is taking in the scuffed wood of the table. Present Mic leans his head against his palm and makes encouraging noises when Fuyumi's tone wavers.

Something is happening here. Aizawa looks at the chipped mugs Fuyumi sets out with an unimpressed stare. Mic drums his fingers against the table and switches the topic of conversation randomly.

Todoroki pushes past Aizawa into the kitchen. He takes the hissing kettle from his sister and grabs the burning bottom with his bare hand to get a better grip. Mic jumps slightly. Small wisps of steam rise from the junction between Todoroki's and the kettle as his skin cools to offset the heat. Fuyumi sets the mugs in a row and Todoroki fills them with practiced ease.

It's an easy pattern to fall into. Endeavor had guests over every once in a while and they were always in charge of the tea. Fuyumi grabs two of the mugs before Todoroki is even finished filling the last two and sweeps off to the dining room with measured steps. Todoroki sets the kettle down and trails after her.

It's concern, he has decided. Present Mic and Aizawa sit together at one side of the table. Mic hides his worry and suspicion under a sharp smile and pointed laughs. Aizawa practically drips with judgment beneath his usual veneer of apathy.

Todoroki sits down next to Fuyumi. He raises an eyebrow and looks at Aizawa. He is fine. He trusts Fuyumi, or at least trusts her most that the majority of people. They might not know how to interact with each other, but she could have moved away and left him a long time ago.

It's difficult to develop healthy relationships in an abusive household. Shared trauma brings people together, Todoroki knows this from his previous life. But when that trauma lives with you, when it's ongoing and seemingly inescapable, even people who are close have trouble defending each other.

Fuyumi didn't say anything during that last, terrible dinner. He left the house with burn holes mottling his shirt and a bruise forming on his face and no place to return to. Fuyumi didn't speak up, but she waited for him. She told him when Endeavor left and she broke down in front of him. She cried and apologized and he told her it was fine.

He doesn't blame her for what happened. Akano retreated to his job across the city and Michio went back to university and he doesn't blame them. It's very easy to ignore a problem and hope it goes away. The human desire to survive creates the automatic sensation of relief when someone else gets hurt and you escape punishment. That relief makes people guilty and it is much simpler to keep running than actually confront your problems. Especially when your problem is so

great that it's ranked number two in the nation.

Todoroki knows this. He's experienced this before. In ten, twenty years when Endeavor retires and they all have grown into themselves, they can rebuild their relationship on steady foundations. He does not blame them and he cares for Fuyumi more, in his emotionally-limited, hesitant way, because she stayed.

His teachers do not need to worry about him in general, but their concern here is completely unjustified. He is fine. Fuyumi is fine. Everything is going to be okay.

Aizawa must see something in his face because he finishes his tea and stands. Mic looks up at him and Aizawa shrugs and says, "I gotta get ready for camp."

"Okay," Mic replies. He smiles at Fuyumi and no matter the intent behind his grin, it's powerful enough to be used as a weapon. "Thank you for your time, young listener!"

Fuyumi nods and they run down the basics of the pleasantries involved in goodbyes. She walks him to the door, still making the obligated small talk, but Aizawa hangs back.

He looks at Todoroki with half-lidded eyes and rubs a hand over his stubble. "You have my number," he says.

Todoroki nods. Aizawa sticks his hands in his pockets. They stare at each other a second longer before Todoroki speaks.

"See you at camp."

Aizawa smiles with teeth. "Sure, kid."

They leave and Fuyumi locks the door. She shows him around the apartment and pats him on the back awkwardly when he tells her that he's tired.

She has an extra tube of toothpaste set out for him and his camp itinerary taped to the fridge. When he collapses in bed, she turns off the lights and retreats to her room.

It's been a good day, he thinks as he drifts off to sleep.

-

"I've signed up for night classes at the college near here," Fuyumi says suddenly.

He glances at her out of the corner of his eye. They are in a small mall by Fuyumi's apartment. The inside is modeled after a town square, with facades built around the doors of stores. The floor is textured to look like cobblestone and Fuyumi's shoes click against it as they walk.

"Okay," he says.

"I'm gong to get a teaching degree." She adjusts her glasses and fidgets with the list of camp supplies in her hands.

He isn't sure why she brought a physical copy. She has the same document both in her email inbox and downloaded to her photos.

Fuyumi is careful like that. She takes his preparedness to a higher level of intensity to offset her anxiety. He wouldn't be surprised if she has a portable phone battery and a back up charger in her purse just in case.

"You like children." Their conversation is stilted enough that just filling the silences with obvious information relieves some of the tension.

Fuyumi smiles at him, like she's genuinely happy he remembers. "I do."

They enter a camping store so he can pick up new hiking boots. Fuyumi rifles through a rack of coats that advertise their ability to survive subzero temperatures. He stares at a display of military grade knives. When they finally reach the counter, he hands over his card.

"I can pay for it," Fuyumi says. She has her wallet in her hands. The cashier pauses and looks awkwardly between the two of them.

"I have money," he replies.

"Shouto-" Fuyumi trails off.

"I have a job. It's fine."

She still seems uncomfortable. Neither of them have a solid understanding of their dynamic. Sometimes they can work together seamlessly, but only in situations like making tea or when she paints his nails. At times when communication or some measure of familiarity is needed, they are like cogs that don't align properly. They

are not synchronized and miss each other more than they spin together.

Their relationship was built on quiet moments. They are more like strangers who have shared space than actual friends, let alone siblings. He cares about her, in his own dubious way, and trusts her as much as he can. They know how to exist side by side, but not how to meet in the middle.

The bridge they are trying to create, in their own uncertain, careful ways, is not built on any connection other than shared pain and silence. They have resorted to the standards that they have observed to interact, barebones templates sloppily stitched over their talks.

Fuyumi thinks that she should pay because she's the older sibling; she's the one who should protect him. There is guilt in her movements because she has failed this preordained task. She is nervous and dependent on this expectation because she has no idea how he thinks, what he needs. She is desperately trying to find a middle ground to create a solid foundation on.

In order to find a middle ground, he has to put in effort too. Relationships are not a one-way street. Both people work to achieve a common goal. One offers information and the other reciprocates. A quid pro quo. An equivalent exchange.

He used to avoid these types of human connections. Dogs are easy because it is obvious what they want and simple to give it to them. Humans though, they hide their needs and sometimes get angry when people cannot read their minds and often seek others out not because they genuinely enjoy their presence, but because they desire something. Each level of friendship is achieved only by handing the other person a larger knife to stab you with.

He grew out of that belief a long time ago. It sticks to him slightly, like almost everything from the past does, but he has met enough people who like him for who he is and, mostly, respect his boundaries.

Fuyumi is trying, he realizes, in the same way—albeit on a different level—Aizawa was. Aizawa asked him about funds because that's his job as a teacher and superior. His actions were to build trust so they can work together easier. There might have been an element of genuine kindness, but their relationship is a professional one.

Fuyumi's motivation is all kindness, all concern. She's trying with no ulterior motive and it is sheer cruelty to not meet her in the middle.

"I'll get this and you can pay for lunch. I'll tell you about my job then." His eye curls into a perfect, smiling crescent.

Fuyumi blinks and a smile of her own breaks out across her face. The cashier bags their purchases and they leave the store.

The café Fuyumi chooses has a nice, shadowed back corner that the waiter leads them to. He tells her about tutoring in a less strained, but still not entirely open, manner than his conversation with Aizawa. She talks about the nursing home and the people in her class and he nods along.

When the waiter brings them their food, he pulls his mask down to his chin. Fuyumi is flustered, despite his limited comprehension of the term. She has seen his face before. 'Trust', he remembers. She doesn't even blink at him when he does, instead taking them time to pull her hair into a pony tail.

"One of our patients went into a coma," Fuyumi says. "It was really strange. He was in a wheelchair but he was mobile and—" she waves

a hand by her head “—there.”

She frowns. “He was sweet. He had this muscle hypertrophy Quirk and whenever the over-sixty ladies’ choir would visit he would pose for them.”

He listens and thinks. That does sound odd.

Their conversation slows gradually. The waiter comes by to refill their waters and he casually covers the bottom of his face with a hand. If Fuyumi notices, she doesn’t say anything.

He looks up to find her adjusting her glasses again. A nervous tic. She rakes a hand through her red and white ponytail and opens her mouth to say something.

“Um—” she cuts off and looks away. On the table, her hand unconsciously curls into a fist.

“Hm?” He tries to lower his shoulders, to look more open.

“If you don’t want to talk about this, I understand. But, um—” she stops again. “It’s not really—” she makes a pained face as she tries to phrase her question.

He waits. Their corner of the restaurant feels detached from the rest of the tables. Plates and cups clink around them, but the sound is compressed and blurry. It feels like they are trying to talk at high altitudes with pressure in their eardrums.

They are silent. Fuyumi's mouth opens and she adjusts her glasses and he just watches her.

"You told dad," she takes a breath and lets it out slowly, "that you were gay."

Ah, so that's what this is about. "I did."

Her face twitches and he feels distantly guilty for some reason. "And, um—" she trails off again.

"And I am. Gay."

"O-okay." She shifts in her seat.

He tilts his head to the side and feels his white hair fall with gravity. It is strange, the differences between these worlds. His teeth are dull and the stars in the sky don't make the same patterns and views on sexuality are... well.

In Konoha, bisexuality was the cultural norm. No one blinked at the tangle of relationships ninja had with each other. Even civilians thought nothing of it. That's just how life was. When heirs were needed, people seamlessly worked it into their schedules and went on with life. The Fire Daimyo's niece was engaged to the Governor of Bird Country's daughter. The first Kazekage's relationship with the second Tsuchikage's uncle was scandalous not because of their gender, but because of cold war the nations were engaged in.

He takes a sip of his water. Fuyumi mentally stumbles over what she wants to say. His phone buzzes in his pocket and he wonders idly

what his classmates are doing.

“Are, um, are there any boys in your class that you like?”

He swallows an ice cube by accident and twitches as he feels the cold lump slide down his throat. Fuyumi’s looking at him hesitantly, but not uncomfortably. “What?”

“Is there anyone in your class that you like?” She asks again.

He thinks of long, blonde hair for a millisecond before repressing the memory as deep as he can. “No,” he shakes his head emphatically. Outside teachers, who he will deliberately ignore, he doesn’t like anyone—cannot see himself liking anyone. Even if he is biologically the age of his classmates, they are all so young.

Maybe in ten years. Or longer. If ever.

He shakes his head again. “No.”

Fuyumi nods solemnly but she’s smiling. They are quiet for a moment before she speaks up again.

“I’m going to visit mom next weekend at the hospital. Do you want to come?”

He doesn’t need to think about his answer, but he pretends to mull it over. For Fuyumi at least, he can act like he’s conflicted.

“No.” He has no desire to see his mother. She was more of a stranger to him than Fuyumi was. Even before she spent eight years in a psychiatric ward with little to no contact with the outside world, she was too distant for him to care about.

When fire danced in tandem to ice on his fingertips, she cried. Endeavor started training him then and she tried to care for him when the man left for work. She hugged him and cooked for him and worried over the bandages that took up more and more skin on his small frame. She tried to treat him like the child he was while Endeavor tried to make him a weapon. She tried to love him, but he had better things to do.

It's almost inhuman to think about the woman, his mother, this way. He remembers a day when he was five and Endeavor kicked him so hard he flew across the room. “Again,” the man said and he stood up on shaky legs and repeated the attack a child his age had no way of landing.

Endeavor waited for him to stumble on his too-short, too-small legs and planted a foot in his stomach. He had choked on bile and gasped for air and his mother had raced into the room. She knelt by him and tried to make Endeavor stop and he brushed her off. He stood up on shaky, too-short, too-small legs and looked up at Endeavor with no emotion but disdain hidden under his blank face.

Too many teeth in a mouth ringed with fire grinned down at him. His mother's breath hitched as she slowly walked backwards out of the room. “Again,” the man said and he repeated the attack a child his age had no way of landing. And he didn't land it that time. Or the next time. Or the time after that.

When he finally hit Endeavor on the inside of his knee, the force behind his fist was so strong he almost tore the man's medial

collateral ligament. The next day his mother carved his eye out of his face.

“Do you blame her?” Fuyumi asks. The tone of their conversation has jumped wildly between lighthearted and serious. He finds himself approaching the level of emotional exhaustion he suffered yesterday.

He shakes his head no. It must have been terrifying, having a child who was not a child. His behavior on top of all the other stressors in her life was too much. He was everything Endeavor wanted: a more powerful, better-trained version of himself. Having the child you loved and cared for turned into the antithesis of everything you wanted, turned into a carbon copy of the man you hated, would be too much for anyone to bear.

He is not his father. He knows this. But on the outside looking in, they are too similar to not endure a comparison. In a strange twist, he is almost glad he lost his blue eye. He does not hate Endeavor, has no strong feelings outside ambiguous scorn for the man, but the less he resembles him the better.

“Maybe later,” he offers Fuyumi. “I’m not ready right now.”

He should feel bad that he can lie so easily to his sister, but he doesn’t. It’s one part conditioning, one part habit, and one part for a good, if morally grey, cause. He wouldn’t have time to see his mother, even if he wanted to. He has work to do and a plan against the League of Villains slowly coming together. In a month, he will pick them apart as easily as he did their numerous predecessors and counterparts.

They finish lunch and return to Fuyumi’s apartment. The calendar pinned to the wall above the stove has a bright red circle around tomorrow with the words ‘SHOUTO’S CAMP’ printed on it. He smiles under his mask and lets Fuyumi burn off her nervous energy by

directing him in the right way to pack.

He doesn't regret accepting Fuyumi's offer to stay with her. It's been nice. Peaceful. A good way to rest before the tough workout camp will bring.

He's excited. He has been working on his Quirk by himself for years. The chance to have experienced pros help him develop further is not one to pass up. Plus, the Internet connection in the middle of the forest is spotty at best. It will be nice to get a break from work.

Chapter End Notes

I think bittersweet is the sweetest I can actually write lmao.

Aizawa probably rehearsed the conversation he was going to have with Todokashi with Present Mic. I'm just imagining Mic stopping Aizawa like "No, Shouta, you can't say that to him. You did the exact same thing four times during high school. Remember when Tensei texted you that he had his wallet stolen? With Tenya's baby pictures in it? And you tracked down the robber and beat them up because you knew that Tensei had only one copy of those photos? Remember that?"

Speaking of Present Mic, you know that man has been in photoshoots before. He's probably advertised things where the proceeds went to charity. Hagakure likes to torture Todokashi with the best pictures she's found. She also went through with her threat to tape pictures of Mic around Todokashi's dorm room. He hasn't taken them down yet because "it's too much trouble." That's definitely the only reason.

I can't believe Todokashi looked at Present Mic out of his hero costume and actually died. What a legend. I'm so proud of him. He's the epitome of Disaster Gay.

I tried to make Todokashi's and Fuyumi's interactions as realistic as possible. It's not easy to just click back into a sibling friendship after you've been through shit. They care about each other and it is difficult for both of them. Todokashi because he first of all has never had a sibling before (closest he got was Minato or his team and we know how that went down) and second of all was very

distant in the beginning of his second life. Fuyumi because she feels guilty that she didn't step in and try to save him. So they are awkward around each other, but trying.

Did you guys catch the part about the nursing home patient? ;^)

Todokashi finally gets to relax. And during camp, he will get to hang out with his friends and improve his skills! Isn't that great! Next chapter, there will be group chats, Todokashi prying into things he should have no way of prying into, Dark Shadow, Bakugou (yikes), and some reveals.

Edit: Shit I forgot to talk about all the amazing cement comments. Thank you guys so much. I honestly didn't do as much research as I should I have on if cement melts. I was going off that clip of Endeavor fighting Noumu and climbing up a building. But cement does not work like at all. I am not going to retcon this because it honestly provides so much more for Todokashi's character. Just imagine this really smart boy who is also super dumb at the same time and does not understand how construction works at all.

Imagine it. Please.

School Trip

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

21:00

Class 1-a Group Chat (School-Related Matters Only)

Iida Tenya: Everyone! Please remember to arrive at the campus parking lot by 6:00am tomorrow. I will be there at 4:30am and I highly recommend you join me at least an hour before the designated meeting time.

Iida Tenya: In addition, here are the digital copies for the packing list and itinerary. Please go through your luggage at least three times to ensure you have everything!

Iida Tenya: UA_CAMP_PACKING_LIST.png

Iida Tenya: UA_CAMP_ITINERARY.png

Yaoyorozu Momo: Thank you Iida. I am going to bring some extra toothbrushes, bottles of sunscreen, and flashlights in case anyone forgets or loses their supplies.

Iida Tenya: An excellent idea Yaoyorozu! I should have thought of it sooner.

Sero Hanta: i kno minas blocked in this chat but she told me she can bring snacks

Shouji Mezou: Does she know about Aoyama's peanut allergy?

Aoyama Yuga: Merci! Or as they say it here, thank you! ☆*°*☆*°

Sero Hanta: lol ok then

Asui Tsuyu: Can you actually speak French Aoyama?

Aoyama Yuga: Oui! Or as they say here, yes! ☆*°*☆*°

Iida Tenya: Sero! Please type in full sentences with capitalization. The

habit of always texting with correct grammar and punctuation can improve your Japanese grade and your essays! Asui and Aoyama! This chat is for school purposes only. Please keep the conversations for direct messages!

Asui Tsuyu: You can call me Tsuyu, Iida

Iida Tenya:

Iida Tenya: ALRIGHT TSUYU

21:12

**I WOULD PUT MY FRIENDS ON TOP OF MY CHRISTMAS TREE
BECAUSE ALL OF THEM ARE STARS**

Iida Tenya: GSG;ALKMA;LADL

Uraraka Ochako: OMG TENYA ARE YOU OKAY???

Iida Tenya: SA;DGLKM'A'DILSKGMQ;INA

Midoriya Izuku: I JUST GOT BACK FROM MY RUN WHATS WRONG

Uraraka Ochako: WHY ARE YOU RUNNING AT NINE PM???

Midoriya Izuku: I WAS ANXIOUS ABOUT THE TRIP

Iida Tenya: A;FKGLNAGLKDNFGPA;JN

Iida Tenya: IM GOING TO STOP EXPRESSING MY EMOTIONS IN
CAPSLOCK TO JOIN URARAKA IN HER SURPRISE AND ALARM.

Uraraka Ochako: DEKU ITS RAINING REALLY HARD OUTSIDE

Midoriya Izuku: I WAS GOING TO DO SQUAT JUMPS BUT I KEPT
LANDING TOO LOUDLY AND MY NEIGHBORS COMPLAINED

Iida Tenya: I THOUGHT TODAY WASN'T LEG DAY?

Uraraka Ochako: EVERYDAY IS LEG DAY

Midoriya Izuku: I JUST FELT LIKE RUNNING

Uraraka Ochako: IN THE RAIN???? AFTER SHIGARAKI ATTACKED YOU?????

Iida Tenya: I KNOW YOU ARE VERY STRONG BUT I AM CONCERNED FOR YOUR SAFETY.

Midoriya Izuku: IM SORRY I WORRIED YOU I DIDN'T REALIZE I WOULD

Uraraka Ochako: WE APPRECIATE AND CARE ABOUT YOU DEKU AND DON'T WANT TO SEE YOU HURT

Iida Tenya: YOU ARE ONE OF MY GOOD FRIENDS. I APOLOGIZE IF WE SOUNDED ANGRY.

Uraraka Ochako: ME TOO. ARE YOU FEELING LESS NERVOUS?

Midoriya Izuku: EG;LKMDAM;LSF;ALFN

Midoriya Izuku: YOU ARE MY BEST FRIENDS THANK YOU IM FEELING BETTER

Midoriya Izuku: wait why are we texting in caps?

Uraraka Ochako: I don't know Iida was doing it

Midoriya Izuku: iida are you okay?

Uraraka Ochako: Oh! I just checked the class chat

Iida Tenya: Tsuyu was very kind to me.

Uraraka Ochako: I feel that!!!!

Iida Tenya: It is nice to know that she is my friend. I admire her forwardness!

Midoriya Izuku: me too!!!

Uraraka Ochako: Me three!!!

21:27

~~All Women Are Queens~~

Uraraka Ochako: Mina!! I saw that you were bringing snacks

Ashido Mina: i was! what do u guys want?

Jirou Kyoka: I like pocky

Asui Tsuyu: Do you need any help? I can make energy balls

Ashido Mina: tooru don't say it

Hagakure Tooru: that's not the kind of ball I need

Hagakure Tooru: nvm

Jirou Kyoka: you guys are terrible

Uraraka Ochako: Those sound great Tsuyu!

Ashido Mina: im gonna ignore tooru so we can get back to the real issues

Ashido Mina: SNACKS

Jirou Kyoka: tooru don't say it

Hagakure Tooru: you know who was lookin like a snack

Hagakure Tooru: fuck

Yaoyorozu Momo: I can have my mother's personal assistant pick up some food from the local bakery. They have the best Mille-Feuille I have ever eaten.

Uraraka Ochako:

Jirou Kyoka:

Ashido Mina:

Hagakure Tooru: okay then

Asui Tsuyu: You're really bourgeois, Yaoyorozu

Uraraka Ochako: Tsuyu!

Asui Tsuyu: I speak what I think

Yaoyorozu Momo: It's okay! I would actually consider my family's

economic status to be 'comfortable' :)

Asui Tsuyu: That's what bourgeois people say, Yaoyorozu

Jirou Kyoka: the millie feullie things sound great. thank you momo

Ashido Mina: lmao I kinda feel bad now I was just gonna get a tub of cheese puffs

Uraraka Ochako: We can do all three!

Hagakure Tooru: im pretty sure satou's making scones too

Ashido Mina: awesome!

Yaoyorozu Momo: Is anyone here allergic to anything? I know Aoyama has a peanut allergy and I think Ojiro is lactose intolerant.

Ashido Mina: nope

Jirou Kyoka: im fine

Uraraka Ochako: I can eat anything

Asui Tsuyu: I can't drink black coffee or lemon juice because it irritates my tongue but everything else is fine

Hagakure Tooru: the only thing that im allergic to is not having blackmail on people

Ashido Mina: lol is this about todoroki?

Hagakure Tooru: nah i got something on him ;^)

Ashido Mina: im low key terrified of you

21:41

dicc the depression out of me daddy uwu

Ashido Mina: school trip tomorrow my dudes

Kaminari Denki: HELL YEAH

Bakugou Katsuki: SHUT THE FUCK UP YOU FUCKING DUMBASS IM TRYING TO SLEEP

Kaminari Denki:

Kaminari Denki: (hell yeah)

Bakugou Katsuki: WHY DO I EVEN PUT UP WITH THIS SHIT

Bakugou Katsuki: ALL OF YOU FUCKASSES DESERVE TO BE DRIVEN OUT INTO THE MIDDLE OF A DESERT AND LEFT TO DIE

Bakugou Katsuki: MAYBE THEN I WOULD FINALLY GET SOME PEACE AND QUIET FOR ONCE IN THIS FUCKING SCHOOL

Bakugou Katsuki: IM DONE WITH THIS BULLSHIT. YOURE ALL BLOCKED

Bakugou Katsuki: EAT MY ENTIRE ASS

Bakugou Katsuki has left the chat

Kirishima Eijirou: I think that's a new record guys

Sero Hanta: was anyone timing it?

Kaminari Denki: under a min easy

Ashido Mina: we can do better

Sero Hanta: whats our gameplan queen

Ashido Mina: cryptid fucking?

Kirishima Eijirou: its been done. maybe we should talk about how hot shouji is again

Kaminari Denki: aw i think i did pretty good

Sero Hanta: u did babe, we're so proud

Ashido Mina: I don't think we can do it in less words tbh

Kirishima Eijirou: lets try for same amount of words but shorter time

Sero Hanta: what abt 'bakugou cant wear gloves'?

Ashido Mina: damn that's good

Kaminari Denki: bakugou's crush on allmight?

Kirishima Eijirou: all might is two words

Kaminari Denki: fuck

Ashido Mina: bakugou's secretly a scorpio?

Sero Hanta: idk if he wld be offended at that

Kirishima Eijirou: man, he's gonna kill us tomorrow

Ashido Mina: lol """"us""""

Kirishima Eijirou: ?

Kaminari Denki: yeah u can harden urself ur fine

Ashido Mina: not the point I was trying to make but alright

Sero Hanta: its ok mina i get u

Kirishima Eijirou: ??

Ashido Mina: don't worry about it

Ashido Mina: so you guys ready for the school trip?

Sero Hanta: HELL YEAH

Kaminari Denki: HELL YEAH

Kaminari Denki: actually tho im worried abt the extra work

Sero Hanta: oh damn u right

Ashido Mina: I cant believe everyone in bakusquad failed

Kaminari Denki: tbh

Sero Hanta: at least its only training tho and not idk

Sero Hanta: the usj again?

Ashido Mina: that's a good point. the only thing that's gonna kill us there are our teachers lol

Kaminari Denki: yeah, our teacher AIZAWA

Ashido Mina: positivity cancelled

Kirishima Eijirou: wait guys, I have it

Sero Hanta: wha?

Kirishima Eijirou: watch this

Ashido Mina: top ten photos taken seconds before disaster

Kirishima Eijirou invited Bakugou Katsuki to the chat

Bakugou Katsuki: WHAT?

Kirishima Eijirou: todoroki

Bakugou Katsuki: FUCK YOU SHITTY HAIR

Bakugou Katsuki has left the chat

Kaminari Denki: hes gonna be so loud tmrw omg

Kirishima Eijirou: worth it

22:03

Stanced up and ready to flex on em

Kirishima Eijirou: do you guys know if we have assigned seating on the busses?

Shouji Mezou: I don't think so. Is Iida in charge of that?

Iida Tenya: Yes, I am! There is no assigned seating but once you pick your partner you will not be able to change. The 'no walking while the bus is moving' rule will be strictly enforced!

Hagakure Tooru: you cant catch what you cant see

Iida Tenya: I am very fast and I will be able to catch you!

Uraraka Ochako: Wait hagakure, what would happen if Aizawa-sensei looked at you?

Satou Rikidou: oh shit that's a good question

Hagakure Tooru: i don't think his eraser quirk works on mutant types

Kirishima Eijirou: that makes sense

Uraraka Ochako: Oh, I thought that your invisibility was the passive state of your Quirk

Satou Rikidou: me too lol

Hagakure Tooru: it's a combo like shouji's or tokoyami's is

Hagakure Tooru: my skin bends visible light around it and my activated quirk lets me control how light refracts

Kirishima Eijirou: that's really cool!

Hagakure Tooru: thank you!!

Iida Tenya: I am glad we are having this educational discussion but please take into consideration that we will be waking up in six hours!

Satou Rikidou: its good, im just gonna pull an all nighter and sleep on the bus

Kirishima Eijirou: how can you do that? If I don't sleep for at least six hours I cant function

Uraraka Ochako: Same!!

Satou Rikidou: it's a talent I kno

Iida Tenya: I think it is less of a talent and more like a problem! Teenagers need between eight to ten hours of sleep a night. Please take better care of yourselves!

Hagakure Tooru: sorry mom

Uraraka Ochako: You're so sweet Iida! Thank you <3 <3

Satou Rikidou: if ur worried abt me u should see todobro lmao

Shouji Mezou: Very few people our age actually get the recommended amount of sleep.

Kirishima Eijirou: I know but todoroki constantly looks tired. Do you

guys know how he's doin'?

Iida Tenya: I would not have realized Todoroki was sleep deprived. He always comes to class prepared and ready to learn!

Hagakure Tooru: yeah hes just really smart. I think he gets like four hours usually

Iida Tenya: This is concerning! I should be paying better attention to my peers!

Uraraka Ochako: Oh no I hope he's ok

Satou Rikidou: i think hes fine. hes stayin w his sis rn so idk

Shouji Mezou: We can talk to all our classmates tomorrow. Right now, we should all go to bed.

Kirishima Eijirou: yeah! Im getting up at four thirty to lift before the trip

Hagakure Tooru: ooh what are you benching these days?

Kirishima Eijirou: im almost up to 180!

Uraraka Ochako: Congrats!

Satou Rikidou: that's awesome bro

Kirishima Eijirou: thanks bro

Iida Tenya: Good job, Kirishima! I should go to sleep as well. Goodnight everyone!

Shouji Mezou: Goodnight.

Satou Rikidou: gn

Uraraka Ochako: See you guys tomorrow!

Kirishima Eijirou: im excited!

Hagakure Tooru: night!

1st Rule of Fight Club: Don't Tell Anyone about Fight Club

Hagakure Tooru: hey shinsou do you guys have camp too?

Shinsou Hitoshi: No.

Hagakure Tooru: omg really?

Shinsou Hitoshi: Yeah, we aren't as talented as 1-A apparently.

Ojiro Mashirao: Shouldn't you be asleep Hagakure

Hagakure Tooru: lol probably

Ojiro Mashirao: I should be at least

Hagakure Tooru: you guys are so mean

Ojiro Mashirao: I think we're just tired

Shinsou Hitoshi: No, I'm mean.

Shinsou Hitoshi: And tired.

Hagakure Tooru: so what are you doing over summer break?

Shinsou Hitoshi: Hopefully sleeping.

Hagakure Tooru: damn ok

Ojiro Mashirao: I'll see you tomorrow Hagakure

Shinsou Hitoshi: I won't.

Todoroki Shouto: practice next week is cancelled for camp by the way

Hagakure Tooru: aww

Hagakure Tooru: ill miss you guys

Ojiro Mashirao: We're about to spend a week together in the middle of a forest

Hagakure Tooru: but what about shinsou?

Shinsou Hitoshi: Stop blowing up my phone.

Hagakure Tooru: i know, ill miss you too buddy

Shinsou Hitoshi: Please let me sleep.

Hagakure Tooru: :^(

Ojiro Mashirao: Goodnight Hagakure

Hagakure Tooru: :,^(

Todoroki Shouto: gn hagakure

22:32

Three Tall Boys (and two short ones)

Shouji Mezou: Is everyone packed?

Kouda Kouji: (°ヾ°)=b

Tokoyami Fumikage: I had to buy shorts

Satou Rikidou: u don't have shorts?

Tokoyami Fumikage: They don't fit my aesthetic

Satou Rikidou: I cant argue w that

Shouji Mezou: @Todoroki Shouto Are you ready?

Todoroki Shouto: yeah, my sister helped me

Satou Rikidou: how was that?

Tokoyami Fumikage: I would like to know too

Todoroki Shouto: shes cool

Kouda Kouji: mmmm?

Todoroki Shouto: shes nice?

Kouda Kouji: mmmm?

Todoroki Shouto: I think she stole my dad's chairs

Satou Rikidou: omg legend

Tokoyami Fumikage: She sounds like a great person

Kouda Kouji: lmao

Shouji Mezou: Is she dropping you off at school tomorrow?

Todoroki Shouto: she didn't want me to take the train

Satou Rikidou: oh ya she lives out in kamino

Tokoyami Fumikage: Didn't their crime rate drop by over seventy percent?

Shouji Mezou: I saw that too.

Kouda Kouji: nice!

Satou Rikidou: wait how long is the bus ride again?

Tokoyami Fumikage: Five hours. We are going to be stopping after three hours to rest, then every hour after that

Tokoyami Fumikage: I already find myself yearning for the peace solitude brings

Satou Rikidou: aww

Kouda Kouji: (ㄥ ㄣ ㄥ)

Tokoyami Fumikage: This is doing the opposite of convincing me this trip will be fun

Kouda Kouji: ㄥ(T ㄣ T)ㄥ

Tokoyami Fumikage: Please stop

Satou Rikidou: u tell him kouji

Todoroki Shouto: what's the worst emoji you have?

Tokoyami Fumikage: No

Satou Rikidou: he's got some terrible ones

Kouda Kouji: um 1 sec

Kouda Kouji: °*。(ﾉ ㉿ ㉿)°*。

Satou Rikidou: wow

Tokoyami Fumikage: Can you delete another person's message?

Shouji Mezou: I like it.

Tokoyami Fumikage: I trusted you, Mezou

Shouji Mezou: I think it's cute.

Todoroki Shouto: same

Satou Rikidou: u guys are wild

Satou Rikidou: anyway GUESS WHO HAS SCONES

Tokoyami Fumikage: Who?

Satou Rikidou: its rhetorical

Kouda Kouji: what kind?

Satou Rikidou: ur fave

Kouda Kouji: omg ily

Shouji Mezou: I can bring coffee tomorrow if anyone wants.

Tokoyami Fumikage: God yes

Todoroki Shouto: thanks shouji

Satou Rikidou: bless u

Kouda Kouji: ty

Shouji Mezou: Alright. I'll see you tomorrow.

-

He sits in the passenger seat of Fuyumi's car, which is actually Akano's car Fuyumi borrowed, and listens to his sister talk about college. She is beaming as she tells him about the advanced courses she is taking in English. Her class had group presentations and she had been lucky to get partners who evenly divided the work.

There is still a dull rush of bitterness in his gut when she mentions the variety of extracurricular classes available to undergraduates. But he is pleased to find that once the initial resentment passes, he is genuinely happy for her. This is something she clearly wants. It's hard to be jealous of someone who smiles as rarely as Fuyumi does.

"I'm just a bit worried," she says and trails off. "Um, they are talking about pay cuts at the nursing home. Apparently the government is cutting funding to elder care resources."

He frowns. His fingers twitch towards his phone. "Oh?"

"I'll be fine!" She looks at his raised eyebrow and smiles even wider. "I can pick up some extra hours. No need to worry about me!"

It's a vicious cycle that pisses him off every time the already low minimum wage is brought into question. Less wages means people either pick up another shift or get a second job. This is bad for almost everyone, even without factoring in the added stress of overwork.

Parents who have to spend more time at work have less time to spend with their kids. They can either pay more for after school care, which most people working minimum wage cannot afford, or let their child spend more time home alone. For younger children, a key part of learning happens when their parents read to them. So if their parents are working, the child enters school behind their peers. Education rates fall. For older children and teenagers, the lack of supervision and inspiration parents provide contributes to bad decisions. This can

range from not doing homework to juvenile crime. Education rates fall. If you cannot graduate highschool, you cannot get a job that pays above minimum wage and, in turn, cannot spend as much time with your own children. The cycle repeats and traps the poor in their income bracket.

For students trying to fund their college education, more time spent at work equals less time for homework. If they manage to attend class, go to their jobs, and do their homework, they have less time to sleep. Their performance in school drops. If they choose to sleep so they can be engaged in class, they cannot keep up with the homework. Their performance in school falls. If they keep their old work schedule despite wage cuts, they decide between food, rent, or school. If they drop out of school, they have less chance to get a higher paying job and are, again, stuck in the cycle of poverty.

He sends off three emails and a large sum of cash. "I believe in you," he tells Fuyumi. She laughs and starts telling him a story about a student who wears a suit every day to class.

The sky is just starting to lighten when she drops him off at U.A. He promises to text her if he finds cell service and waves as she leaves. Iida is already standing by the buses and talking enthusiastically to Midoriya and Uraraka. Todoroki spots Shouji holding five cardboard cups in his hands and walks over.

"You know about the location change?" Shouji asks as he passes over Todoroki's latte.

"Yeah. What happened?" He turns away from the group and lifts the bottom of his mask over his mouth to drink his coffee.

"Midoriya was attacked. Middle of the day in a crowded mall. They had to evacuate the whole place."

“Ah.” He had not checked his chat site last night. Someone probably reported it there.

“They’re getting braver,” Shouji says quietly. Kaminari and Kirishima come into view and greet anger-issues loudly. The sound of small explosions popping echoes across the dark parking lot. “I overheard the teachers planning what to do next.”

“The Genius Office is setting something up,” he replies.

Shouji looks like he wants to ask for Todoroki’s source, but holds off. “At least we are going to be out of the city for a week. We’ll be safer than anyone here.”

Todoroki hums. They are targeting All Might. The hero is most likely going to be increasing his presence in the country while school is out of session.

Tokoyami arrives next and graciously accepts his tea from Shouji. “Oh how I fear the dawn. The darkness may curse me with visions, but the day is when my nightmares come to life.”

Shouji nods solemnly. “Do you want some of my coffee?”

“Please.” Tokoyami drains his chai and gives the empty cup to Dark Shadow. It tries to toss the cup into the trashcan. On the seventh try, it finally gets it in and crows for victory.

“Again!” It demands and reaches for Shouji’s still full coffee cup in

Tokoyami's hand. He plants a hand against its face and pushes it backwards while he takes another sip. Dark Shadow flails wildly as Tokoyami passes the cup back to Shouji.

"Again, again, again." It chants. Todoroki finishes his coffee and hands the cup over. Dark Shadow warbles delightedly as it circles the trashcan.

"Was DS up all night?" Shouji asks.

"Yes. It was excited for the 'sleep over'." Tokoyami looks dead inside. Todoroki pats him on the shoulder.

Satou and Kouda finally get to the parking lot five minutes before the deadline. They are both carrying large Tupperware in addition to their luggage. Satou mumbles something that might be a greeting and cradles the cup Shouji gives him to his chest.

Aizawa opens the door to the bus at 6:00am exactly and tells them to load their bags. Iida lines the whole class up. He does a headcount three times before he is sure they have not forgotten anyone, and only forgets to count himself once. Midoriya says goodbye to the students from 1-B before everyone gets in and collapses into their seats.

Satou reveals the scones he brought to be raspberry and white chocolate. Yaoyorozu passes around a box of delicate French pastries. Mina throws boxes of pocky at people. From his seat next to Satou, Todoroki watches the chaos with a smile.

Three hours later, they make their first stop at a small scenic lookout. Todoroki nudges Satou awake and they all climb out the bus to stretch.

“Where is the rest stop?” Kouda asks under his breath.

“Yeah, I’m thirsty. My mouth feels like it has cotton in it.” Satou makes a face.

“You shouldn’t have snored then,” Tokoyami tells him.

“I thought you’d accept me for who I was, Tokobro.”

“Hmm. No.”

Shouji plants his hand on top of Tokoyami’s head and ruffles his feathers into a wild peak. Tokoyami slaps at his arm and tries to flatten his plumage. Aizawa slouches his way to the only other car parked in the lookout.

“Of course we stopped here for a reason.” He says. The door of the car flies open and two women step out in colorful hero costumes.

“Heya Eraser!” The hero Todoroki recognizes as Mandalay from the Wild, Wild, Pussycats greets.

“Sorry. Haven’t seen you in a while,” Aizawa replies. He shifts almost awkwardly. “How’s Tobiharu?”

Todoroki faces Pixie-Bob and pretends to pay attention to her excited greeting. He tilts his head to the side to listen in on Aizawa and

Mandalay's conversation.

He hears Mandalay sigh. "She's okay. It's been a few years, you know. She has Yomiru helping her. He's a complete shut in, but she manages to get outside."

"Yomiru's the video editor, yeah?"

He sees Mandalay nod out of the corner of his eye. "With the film student friend, Tsuko I think. Mental Quirks have to stick together, you know."

"That's good. I talked to Kesagiriman the other day. He says hi."

"I'll let her know. If you see him again, tell him he's invited to dinner. It's the least we can do."

Todoroki is unable to eavesdrop further as Pixie-Bob uses her Quirk to push the whole class off a cliff.

-

The forest is dense with undergrowth and whenever conversation or combat ebbs, the buzz of insects breaks through the silence. The trees creak overhead and branches crack in the distance as animals race away from the dirt creatures. Light breaks through the canopy to dapple the forest floor in shifting patches of sunshine.

Todoroki has missed this. He hasn't been in the woods in ages. The

oaks here don't compare to the redwoods of Konoha, but the air is thick with the smell of damp earth and fallen leaves. It's calming, even as his class trips over roots and jerks around constantly to try to spot Pixie-Bob's creations.

A multi-limbed creature with the face of a stag breaks through the trees on his right to charge at him. Todoroki flicks a hand up and spears of ice fly from the ground to embed in its stomach. The beast roars as it crumbles back to dirt.

“THAT WAS MINE, CYCLOPS BASTARD.”

Todoroki turns to Kouda. “What were you saying?”

Kouda fights a smile. ‘I got some birds to try to find the camp. They will fly back when they find it,’ he signs.

“HEY DON'T IGNORE ME YOU FUCK!”

Todoroki relays the information to the group and watches anger-issues turn red.

They manage to make it through one more wave of monsters before the tension snaps. Todoroki has the legs of a creature pinned in ice and is watching Satou fly at with his fist raised when a hand comes down on his shoulder. He freezes, his shoulders like iron as they stiffen. Satou punches the earth beast so hard it explodes. Shouji is up ahead, eyes and ears swiveling to pick up incoming monsters. Kouda sends a group of birds to peck out the eyes of a smaller creature so Dark Shadow can tear through it. Hagakure shrieks in laughter as she leads a monster into Sero's tape.

No one else has any good reason to stop him like this. He resists the instinct to grab the hand on his shoulder and break it. Instead, he slowly turns his head to face whoever the fuck is behind him.

It's anger-issues. The hand digging into his shoulder starts smoking. Todoroki stares with nothing but forced apathy as anger-issues' scowl grows.

"Yo," Todoroki says and does not smile. His voice sounds low and dangerous to his own ears. At the edges of his vision, he sees Midoriya turn to say something and stop, staring at the two of them.

He can hear the buzz of insects louder now. The forest is still and the humidity gives the area under the trees a molasses-like quality, as if every movement they make is through dense walls of vapor.

"Listen, you one-eyed piece of shit," Bakugou smiles with too many teeth, "let's have a competition. Whoever can kill more of these things wins. Loser has to stay out of my fucking way the rest of the trip."

Todoroki grabs Bakugou's wrist. "I have a better idea. Why don't you start working as a part of a team instead of throwing tantrums because you're insecure of your newfound inferiority?"

The hand in his grip crackles with smoke.

"Um, why don't you guys just—"

"Shut the fuck up Deku this doesn't involve you." Bakugou turns to Todoroki and his expression is furious. "I think I can do better than that. Why don't we fucking fight right here. Do you want to go, or

would you rather take it easy like you always do? I'm sure your dad is proud of you. You don't think you have to go all out on anyone 'cause you're so much better than us."

"Bakugou—" Kirishima starts to say. Kaminari fists the back of his shirt as he tries to run forwards. On the other side of the loose circle, Shouji is holding onto Tokoyami. Dark Shadow is slowly growing under the shade of the trees.

Todoroki uses the centimeters of height he has to stare down at the other boy. He projects boredom like a weapon, but the fingers encircling Bakugou's wrist tighten reflexively. The joints there are weak, he knows. Pushback from his explosions wears at the cartilage. If he would just *pull* and *twist* the ligaments would snap like rubber bands.

He drops Bakugou's wrist and steps back. Attacking his classmates will not look good on his already spotty record. Even self-defense at this point is touch and go. Bakugou's a promising student with great potential. He has a powerful Quirk and good grades and a will to succeed that burns those around him.

And most importantly, he's a child. Todoroki... isn't.

"I don't want to miss lunch," he says instead of retaliating. He puts his hands in his pockets and takes another step backwards.

Bakugou's eyes fill with rage. "You—" he manages to get out before Kirishima bravely risks his life to grab him. Todoroki watches as he is tugged away and does not react.

"How about we race!" Mina says and it sounds too loud over the drone of the bugs. "We can split into teams! Whoever gets to camp

first, um, can have the rest of my pocky. Yeah, that sounds good.”

“I’m not sure—” Iida is interrupted by Midoriya.

“It would be good practice too. Working in small groups gives us more of a challenge to take the monsters down.” He backs away from anger-issues and accidentally bumps into Uraraka.

The uncomfortable silence of the class eases as people drift into groups. Yaoyorozu makes walkie-talkies for the four unofficial leaders: Kirishima, Midoriya, Shouji, and herself.

Team Kirishima, made up of Mina, Kaminari, Sero, and Bakugou, leaves as soon as they get their walkie-talkie. They drag Bakugou with them.

Team Midoriya, composed of Iida, Uraraka, Tsuyu, and Aoyama, turns to what Iida proclaims is the North and takes off next.

Team Yaoyorozu, with Jirou, Mineta, Ojio, and Hagakure, follow the destruction Team Kirishima left in their wake. Hagakure throws a peace sign, or possibly a middle finger, back at Todoroki.

The forest is silent again. Todoroki drags a palm over his face. “Sorry.”

“Not your fault,” Shouji says. “He acted first.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Kouda whispers.

Satou offers a thumbs up. They turn to look at Tokoyami.

Dark Shadow has swollen to the size of the trees and tower over them. It cackles intermittently. Tokoyami glares at the trail Team Kirishima took. “Fucker, motherfucker, fuck, fuck, fuck,” Dark Shadow chants.

Tokoyami looks Todoroki in the eye. “If he comes near you again, I will astral-project and perform the spiritual form of defenestration on his soul.”

“I’ll eat him!” Dark Shadow says. It sounds delighted.

“Thank you, I’ll keep that in mind.” Some of Todoroki’s frustration has seeped away. Satou claps him on the back just as a new horde of earth creatures bursts through the tree-line.

In the end, Team Shouji comes in second place. While their route to the campgrounds was the most direct, thanks to Kouda’s communications with animals and Todoroki’s natural forest instincts, they stopped to have lunch. Kouda had two scones still in his pockets from breakfast, Tokoyami brought a box of pocky off the bus, and Shouji had a Ziploc bag of Tsuyu’s energy balls that Hagakure traded him for another one of Yaoyorozu’s pastries.

Todoroki melts ice into their cupped palms whenever someone became thirsty. As a group, they decide to not touch Satou’s collection of sugar cubes, pixie sticks, and mini packages of skittles.

They climb over a fallen tree, following a family of squirrels Kouda bribed with some scone, to the sight of picnic tables and a large,

multi-storied building. Team Yaoyorozu looks like they arrived just minutes before. Jirou's earjacks are bruised, Hagakure's panting, Mineta's scalp is bleeding, and Ojio's tail is trailing on the ground. Every time Yaoyorozu inhales, Todoroki can see her ribs.

They are all covered in dirt and sweating. When Team Shouji walks towards them, Hagakure flops down on the ground with a sigh.

"Oh my god," she gasps for breath, "how do you guys not even look winded?"

Todoroki eyes his group. Satou has discarded his shirt a while ago and his eyes are glazed over from the use of his Quirk. Kouda is breathing hard, but Todoroki's knowledge of sign let him save his voice for controlling animals. Tokoyami has dirt on his knees from tripping over a tree root, but otherwise is fine. Shouji is similarly scuffed up.

And the only damage Todoroki sustained was the loss of his tie to garrote a monster about an hour into their trip. He shrugs at Hagakure and smiles under his mask as she whines about having to walk twenty miles.

Almost ten minutes later, the final two teams arrive. They have grass stains on their shirts and dust covering their faces. Kaminari is wheezing with Quirk overuse and Aoyama bends over to throw up behind a tree. Uraraka pats him on the back in nauseated solidarity.

"You're finally here!" Pixie-Bob greets.

Todoroki scans the group. Midoriya is covered in scrapes but beaming under his exhaustion. Anger-issues just growls lowly and slumps into a crouch, holding a shaking arm to his chest. They must have had a fight. Kirishima tries to smile at Todoroki but starts coughing.

Bakugou meets his eyes and sneers. Todoroki tilts his head and blinks slowly. Obnoxiously. He turns away to face Aizawa.

“Good teamwork. For the most part.” Aizawa says into his scarf. He does not look at anyone but his words are pointed.

Pixie-Bob compliments his, Iida’s, Midoriya’s, and anger-issues’ skills. She looks like she’s about to hug him, so he ducks down quickly and pretends to tie his shoe. Midoriya tries to greet the child that’s been tagging along with Mandalay and gets punched in the groin. The kid’s form is very impressive. Todoroki doesn’t hear what he says, but Midoriya pales.

He encounters his next problem of the day when the sleeping accommodations are revealed.

It’s a group room that thirteen boys are going to be shoved into. Plus him. Just futons on the floors lined in perfect rows of six with five inches of space between them. Blankets and pillows included. For a whole week.

He knows that this was a logical possibility. The dorms at U.A. had his hopes up. Of course it wouldn’t be the same for an inn in the middle of a sprawling forest. But he thought there would at least be rooms that they would double up in. He would claim Shouji as a roommate, because Shouji doesn’t talk, and if he woke up with a scream trapped behind his teeth it would be fine. Shouji would look at him with concern but he wouldn’t mention it. He worries in silence. Todoroki appreciates that.

Take a deep breath. In seven, hold seven, out seven. Unlucky for everything except staving off anxiety. Count to ten. Think of nothing.

It's going to be fine. Everything is going to be okay.

He dumps his bags on one of the futons by the door. Satou complains that they are going to be stepped on if someone goes to the bathroom in the middle of the night, but sets his suitcase nearby. The room is filled with half-hearted chatter as everyone tries to claim a spot by their friends. The mood picks up considerably as they leave to rejoin the girls for dinner.

He thinks as he spoons a good amount of curry on his rice. He hasn't had a nightmare in two days. It has gotten better over the years. He used to be unable to go a night without reliving one of the many traumatic experiences he has had. At sixteen, it is more uneven. Some weeks he wakes up every other hour scrabbling for breath. Other times it takes days before the dreams come back.

The nightmares vary in intensity too. Todoroki does not have good dreams, or at least ones that he can remember. Sometimes he will have a disjointed talk with someone from another world, but he wakes up with melancholy pulling on his ribs. Most nights, he just sits up with traces of fear lingering at the back of his mind. When he tries to reach for what he was running from, it evades his grasp. The ones he does recall keep him awake to blink at the shifting patterns of light on his ceiling before he is able to drift off again.

The ones that spiral into panic and follow him into awareness are the ones he worries about. These dreams lead to trembling limbs and a heavy weight on his chest and the sensation of his throat closing up and desperate dread running in circles through his head. These are the ones he stuffs himself into the corner of his closet for until he can shake off the beast of panic riding in his veins.

He knows how to manage the stressors of his waking life. He can avoid crowds and not flinch at fireworks and hold himself steady against conditioned reactions. When people raise their hands, he watches them but does not shy away. When people touch him without

his permission, he does not snap at them. When he is awake, he is fine.

But when he's asleep, it's a different story. The cold lizard core of his brain tugs him in the patterns that have been carved into him by two wars, seven years of black ops, and countless near-death experiences. He has no control in his dreams and that, he thinks, is what really breaks him.

-

The hot springs start subdued as everyone soaks their sore muscles but quickly escalates.

He sinks into the water next to Shouji and sighs. Kaminari is looking at them. It's the masks, he thinks. Hopefully Shouji's sheer presence will ward off any questions.

Todoroki is honestly surprised when only Sero asks about what happened to his chest. There is a thick white line of scar tissue from the where the doctors pieced together his ribs for Recovery Girl to heal. Underneath it is a circle of raised keloid tissue from the chest tube insertion. Another thin line across his shoulder and a larger patch of pale skin stretching across his palm, but they are not as exciting. Or as close to his vitals.

"Hero Training," he says, "the swordfish came back for revenge."

Kaminari looks very confused but laughs with Sero anyways. Next to him, Shouji huffs.

“Wait a sec, Todoroki.” Kaminari stops laughing. His eyebrows draw together in confusion. “I always wanted to know, do you have an eyeball in your, you know?”

Todoroki reaches a hand up to touch the scar that cuts across the left side of his face. It is much more obvious when it is not covered by his eye patch. The scar starts high on his forehead, bisects his eyebrow, and continues below his mask. “Nope,” he says and sinks further into the hot spring.

“Can I see it?” Kaminari swims over and leans in. Kirishima looks over from where he is chatting with Midoriya.

“Dude—”

“It just looks like skin,” Shouji says by his side. He crosses all six of his arms and stares at Kaminari.

Kaminari takes the hint and backs up with his hands raised. “I’ll just look it up.”

Todoroki knows Shouji has never seen his eye socket, but appreciates his effort. It does look like skin, but fleshier and damper. Other than that, it’s underwhelming. Hopefully Kaminari will realize this when they return to a place with internet connection.

It’s quiet for a minute as he and Shouji watch steam rise off the water.

Then Mineta tries to climb the divider between the women’s and men’s spring. The toddler from before pushes him off the wall then falls himself. Midoriya takes the kid, who has fainted, back inside to

Mandalay. Mineta is put under Iida's strict watch.

-

Todoroki lays on his futon with his eyes closed. He is in his pajamas: a loose pair of sweatpants that are pilling on the thighs and t-shirt emblazoned with picture of a yelling duck and text underneath it that reads 'I CANNOT TURN OFF BEAST MODE.' Satou gave it to him. It's one of his favorites.

Shouji shifts in his sleep next to him. He has been slowly taking up more and more space across the floor over the past hour. A snore comes out from the pile of pillows Kirishima has piled on top of his head. Kouda sniffs and rolls half his torso across Satou.

Todoroki inhales, exhales. He counts to ten. Then counts again. Then counts again. His heartbeat thuds against his eardrums.

In a way, it is relaxing to be next to people. He is probably touched starved and the white noise of blankets rustling and thirteen people breathing is calming. But while his spine sinks deeper into the futon, his mind races.

He inhales, exhales. Counts to ten. Counts to one hundred and back down and focuses on releasing the tension in each of his muscle groups. One more hour, he thinks. If he hasn't fallen asleep by then, he will put in his earbuds and turn on a podcast.

There is a high rated one about how the military has changed since Quirks appeared in the population. Another one discusses antiquated law in modern society, and a third covers the use of Quirk dampening drugs in North America. It is all fascinating and necessary if he is going to be able to establish contacts abroad. Just Estonia, Romania,

some of Central Asia, and North Africa is not going to cut it. The United States still has the largest military in the world and a lot of weight to throw around. He should read up on Korea too. Maybe Australia and some of the Pacific Island nations.

But he's getting ahead of himself. Inhale, exhale. Count to ten. Count to ten again. Count down from o—

He drifts off into sleep.

-

His eyes snap open when an alarm goes off five. He sits up quickly and accidentally knocks off one of Shouji's forearms that had somehow migrated to rest on his head. Todoroki blinks at the grey sky outside and surveys the room.

A mass of mumbling, bleary-eyed teenagers greets him. Todoroki grabs his toothbrush and gym uniform out of his suitcase and escapes to the bathroom.

He is fine, he thinks as he spits water into the sink. Five more days. He can do this.

Breakfast and the walk to the training grounds is punctuated by yawns. Tokoyami is the only one who looks anywhere as awake as Todoroki is. Aizawa greets them in a clearing and details the goals of their camp session. Todoroki frowns when he mentions provisional licenses. Those are usually only reserved for second year students and higher. U.A. must be serious about preparing for the inevitable League confrontation.

“Starting today,” Aizawa says, “you’ll improve your Quirks. This’ll be so harsh that you’ll wish you were dead, so do your best to stay alive.” He grins with too-wide eyes.

Todoroki stifles a laugh and starts a warm up jog with his classmates around the large field. After five laps, they drop with practiced ease into stretches. P.E. is twice a week, plus a double period on Wednesdays. Pre-training exercises have become routine after months of school.

All four Pussycats have arrived to the field by the time the sun creeps over the horizon. They introduce themselves and Todoroki finds himself watching Tora. He looks away as Mandalay starts to speak.

“Alright! We are going to be dividing up based on Quirk types.” She uses both her gloved hands to point to Ragdoll, who waves excitedly and takes over.

“Emitter types first! Aoyama, Ashido, Kaminari, Bakugou, Sero, Kouda, Mineta, Uraraka, Todoroki, and Yaoyorozu come stand by me.

“Hagakure and Jirou! You’re both Mutant-Emitter types so you’re going to be part of Pixie-Bob’s group with Ojiro, Asui, and Iida. Tomorrow you two will switch to the Emitter group.

“Shouji, Kirishima, Tokoyami, and Satou are with Mandalay. You’ll work on using your Transformation type quickly and for longer periods of time!

“And Midoriya!”

“Wha-?” Midoriya looks around like he has just noticed he is the last person to be called into a group.

Ragdoll grins. “You’re a power-up kind of Emitter so you’ll be with Tora!”

Midoriya nods enthusiastically and follows the large man to a section of the field away from the rest of the training grounds. Todoroki sees Tora demonstrate a stance that Midoriya quickly copies.

“Okay kittens!” Ragdoll wiggles her clawed fingers at them. Mina bounces up and down in excitement, shaking Sero and Kaminari with both her hands. “We’re going to increase our limits!”

She goes over a detailed plan of everyone’s schedule and goals. Todoroki apparently is excellent at control and ability to quickly switch between fire and ice, but lacking in power. He will be sitting in a tub of water and making sure he stays cool while he also boils it. At the same time, he will be alternating between creating specific shapes of ice and directing his flames without physical cues.

He strips out of his jacket, lights the fire under the tub, and climbs into it. A bead of sweat drips down his back as the temperature of the water soars. The surface starts to ripple and he wraps his hands on either side of the tub. His cold fingers dig into the burning metal and steam rises from the contact. A slender column of ice starts to grow off the ground in front of him. When it reaches his eye-level, he pulls heat from the air and ignites an arcing path to the sculpture.

It is going to be a long day.

They are excused for dinner to find they have to make their meal. Iida takes control of the situation and directs everyone with wild, full-body gestures. Todoroki covers his palm in ice and presses it against a patch of red on the outside of his thigh. Maintaining a cool body temperature is not as easy as just sending a wave of cold down his limbs. He has to create a thin film of ice on the outside of his skin that is thick enough to protect against heat but thin enough that he can move. Where he must create the layer shifts as his heat source does, and when he has to switch between ice and fire, it dissipates quickly against the heat.

He has narrowed down the interval to mere milliseconds over the years, but it would be nice to use both parts of his Quirk simultaneously. Though lightening is the magnum opus he's working towards, there are a few techniques that are similarly powerful and out of his reach.

Creating and directing steam by mixing both aspects of his Quirk is something he's thought of. Gaining enough control over his ice constructs so he can change their shape after he creates them is another. While weather manipulation requires power, steam needs increased creation speed and shaping necessitates fine control. The exercises Rag Doll has him doing are improving all three.

But they are draining. He lights the fires under the cooking pots to Mina's applause. Iida then assigns him chopping duty, unfortunately relatively close to anger-issues.

"Do you know where the knives are, Todoroki?" Uraraka asks from her position between the two of them.

"Ah." He looks around and sees nothing. Anger-issues stomps off in the direction of the Pussycats to demand proper cutlery. He lifts up the side of his shirt and pulls a knife from the shoulder sheath he has.

“It’s serrated but it should work.”

Uraraka stares at him. “You. Have a knife.”

He pulls the other knife from the shoulder sheath and grabs a potato from the pile to peel it. “More than one.”

“Todoroki.”

“Hm?”

“Why do you have knives?”

He looks at her and raises an eyebrow. “I’m always prepared.”

“But a knife.”

Anger-issues choses that moment to come back to the table and slam two chef knives against the wood. “You can get your own, cycl—” he stares as Todoroki looks up from cutting a potato into wedges. “How the fuck did you get a knife?”

“He brought them!” Uraraka chirps. Todoroki nods and goes back to peeling potatoes. Anger-issues looks like he is about to have an aneurysm.

The curry is not the best Todoroki’s had, but it is good after a long day of training. There is raucous conversation down the table. Jirou

punches Sero across the jaw for some reason. Kouda feeds a mouse in his sweatshirt pocket grains of rice. Midoriya chases after the toddler Mandalay brought.

They are going to be fine, Todoroki thinks as he watches his classmates laugh under the string lights ones of the Pussycats set up. This is going to be a nice break. To be able to concentrate on training instead of villains and statistics and the balancing act that is his life makes his head feel lighter. Like the rush of schemes and possibilities through his mind is not the most important thing in his life.

Five more nights of training and they will all have improved. Five more nights of peace before they will throw themselves back into school and families and extracurriculars. One week of peace to breath and not stress about the shifting power balances of Japan's underworld.

Todoroki smiles into his bowl as he manages to distract everyone in his general vicinity by hinting Hagakure has some new gossip. They are going to be fine.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not gonna lie, Midoriya, Uraraka, and Iida's chat was my favorite to write. I scrolled through r/wholesomememes to find the title for their chat but I started crying at pictures of dogs. My brother came into my room and saw me sobbing in front of me computer screen. He took a picture of my gross, splotchy face, captioned it 'when you have the big gay', and put it on his snapchat story. He has surpassed me in power. The true being of chaos in this household. I'm so proud.

Okay fellas, let's talk about Bakugou. And let me just admit, I like his character. It took over almost a hundred chapters in the manga to change my opinion, but here we are. He's a whiny piss-baby with at least one complex and a hell of a lot he has to make up for. What's not to love.

Sarcasm aside, I'm not excusing his actions at all. His canon character growth is still on going. But this isn't canon at all! And

Todokashi is a wildly different character from his canon counterpart. To Bakugou, he's the most powerful dude in the class who soared through the Sports Festival without breaking a sweat. He even made a joke of it (not going all out in the obstacle course, not using Quirk combatively during his first two fights, bantering with Tokoyami). He is number two in the class but has openly admitted to never studying, he comes off as dick because he doesn't talk outside a pretty small circle of friends, and Bakugou probably found out about the after-school training with Midoriya. Basically, Bakugou went from a position where he was indisputably the best to second place where the top student doesn't even recognize him as competition. So Bakugou really doesn't like Todokashi.

I tried to write a Bakugou POV in part two but I couldn't get his character down. I would recommend the [see it all in bloom series by aloneintherain](#) and [a heart swelled to bursting by eggstasy](#) if you want to see what I would *attempt*. They are both really great writers and I love their fics.

Oh, and this is what Todokashi's [shoulder sheath looks like](#). Imagine that but he has two of them. Because he's extra.

Tune in next time for... Well. At least one chapter note at the beginning with a content warning. It's time to get into how Todokashi came to be. If you don't know anything about Naruto, I'll post an explanation at the end of the major points, because we are about to go all out. The cameos will include 'an emotional sucker punch', 'a couple really good sentences that almost made me cry', Tora (god bless), and character growth. See you this weekend.

Dreams

Chapter Notes

TW: a panic attack (very explicit compared to what I usually write), flashbacks, minor suicidal ideation, mentioned character death

Um, and a very vague torture scene. You guys remember [Tsukuyomi](#)? Yeah. Just wanted to give you guys a heads up.

If you want to skip all of the stuff listed above, start reading at "Bakugou slowly reaches into his pocket and pulls out his phone." I will bold this line.

If you want to just skip the panic attack, as it is the most graphic of the above, stop reading at "Zero." and start again with the bolded sentence.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

He leans back in his chair and stares at the dark shapes of roofs against the setting sun. The main street stretches far into the distance and just at the horizon, the towering walls of the village rise from the dark soil to wrap across the very edges of what he can see. Behind them, red woods stand tall and solemn under the greying sky.

He can almost hear them here, creaking as the wind winds around their trunks. His chair tips further back until it stops against the side of his desk. He flicks a pen through his fingers and watches the sun sink under the wall.

The moment of stillness ends when the only remnants of light left in the sky are ashy streaks of orange. He debates opening Obito's eye to capture this calm scene before it fades completely and he is forced to return to paperwork. No, he decides in the end. This is a memory for himself of the present. There will be a thousand sunsets. If they manage to make it past this war, there will be a thousand more.

He runs his fingertips across the top of his desk. He needs to get back to work. There are orders are sign and troop movements to go over with Shukaku and budgets to approve. The lights of his office click on as someone opens the door.

“Hoka—”

-

“Seventy-one hours, fifty-eight minutes, and twenty-five seconds.”

A sword slices across his neck and he dies choking on his own blood.

-

Tsunade’s face is lined with concern. She maintains the illusion of youth easily, but she cannot escape the stress of her position entirely. “Jiraiya missed this month’s checkup,” she says.

He stares at the writing in his book without reading it. A mask on a mask on a mask. “Maa, he probably attended that festival in Yu and couldn’t get back in time.”

Tsunade doesn’t smile. He doesn’t either. They both know what this means. There have been rumors of swelling forces in Ame. Kusa’s internal problems have quieted without warning and Taki has stopped requesting joint missions. The cold war they have waged since the last peace treaty is growing to a close.

She passes him a file. “They met with a contact in Ishi a week before they were supposed to report in Kawa.”

That's roughly two thousand miles to cover, most of it in enemy territory. Kawa's aligned through trade routes and Kaze has become friendly after Gaara's inauguration, but Ishi and Ame are decidedly hostile.

He wonders how he is going to finally see his student after two years without contact. He thinks back to the day Naruto left on this training trip, how he smiled bright as the sun and declared that he would succeed. He pictures his sensei's son without any light left in his eyes.

"I'll leave ton—"

-

"Sixty-eight hours, thirty minutes, and seventeen seconds."

A red moon stares back at him through the haze of blood loss.

-

Danzo crept in like kudzu, slowly growing over the land until suddenly he covered everything. The city square was still stained red when he finally came back from his mission. They had buried the heads of the dissenters in the forest. "Fertilizer," the new dictator called it. "Finally loyal in death," he declared.

The man comes to visit him in the hospital. He pushes the image of Sakura's tear-stained face out of his mind and reports to his leader. Tsunade's funeral is tomorrow. Everyone knows what killed her—who killed her—but no one will say it aloud. The blank masks of Root survey the village from rooftops and telephone poles.

"That is unfortunate," Danzo says when he finishes debriefing.

“Jiraiya was a loyal spy for the village. The Kyuubi was a vital resource too. We will have to increase our forces to compensate for these losses.”

He grits his teeth and nods with no emotion on his face. His torso is heavy with chakra-depletion and burns spiderweb up his arms. He lost count after he stuck his hand through the twelfth chest. It faded into a crimson blur as Obito's eye spun, spun, spun.

Danzo leans forward and he cannot move, too exhausted from sprinting hundreds of miles and burning his reserves to the lowest embers. He needed to get home, needed to tell Tsunade about the swirling black and red cloaks leading armies, needed to deliver her the two black-edged scrolls containing the remains of...

It was too late. Danzo's scarred fingers pull the lid over Obito's eye open. It pinwheels slowly and the seals around it glow, soaking up the chakra that has started regenerated in his coils. Danzo drags a fingernail down one of the twisting lines Rin painted on his cheek so long ago.

“You should focus on getting better. Useless tools have no need for assets like this.” Danzo lets his eyelid fall close and his breathing grows shallow as the scraps of energy in his coils dip dangerously. The heart monitor by his bedside shrieks.

Danzo's fingers hook over the edge of his mask and his chest tightens as the cloth is pulled down. Another machine joins in on the monitor's wails. The tip of his nose is exposed to cold air and he can't, he can't threaten to take his eye then do this.

A knock on the door. Danzo turns around and he manages to make one of his blistering, exhaustion-heavy arms reach up to tug his mask up over his nose. The nurse steps into the room and Danzo sighs.

“We will continue this talk later, Ka—”

-

“You are doing very well, Kakashi-senpai. Most people would have broken by now.”

He gasps for breath against the black wood of the cross. Itachi’s face is a paradox, a mask filled with emptiness. He is negative space, a void of empathy, something too ancient to understand. His eyes glow white and are hollow.

“Fifty-two hours, forty-seven minutes, and ten seconds.”

The sword lodged in his stomach twists.

-

He doesn’t regret starting the chain of events the led to this. In his mind, the first domino was not even his to push. But it toppled and he merely retaliated in the way that would benefit the village the most.

Sasuke’s sword stabs through Danzo’s chest and his old student screams. Sweat is streaming down his face, mixing with the tears and blood pouring from his red, red eyes. The sword comes down again and again and Sasuke is shaking. The screaming doesn’t cut off even after the final eye on Danzo’s arm closes.

The teenager staggers and leaves his sword wedged between Danzo’s ribs. Sasuke brings a foot up and stomps down on Danzo’s head. Again. And again. And again.

The three following him only approach when Danzo's skull is aerosolized across the ground in a bloody spray. They put their hands on Sasuke's shoulder, lead him away from the corpse, let him choke off sobs and smear the various fluids on his face into their sleeves.

He sits in a tree on the other side of the clearing and watches the four enemies of his village flee away from the all-seeing shadows of the redwoods. Only when he can no longer sense them, he jumps down from his perch to collect Danzo's body.

He does not regret leaking the details of the Uchiha massacre. Danzo started this war, but the man never anticipated the lengths he would go to protect his home. He will not let any more of those precious to him die at the madman's hand.

Fire blooms from his mouth and he directs it at his own body, not even flinching as his flesh burns. The open wounds of his confrontation with four cells of Root soldiers are bleeding into his clothes, staining the dark blue of his jounin uniform black. He hefts the corpse over his shoulder and limps his way back into the village.

The next day, he is inaugurated as the sixth—

-

"Forty-seven hours, fifty-nine minutes, and fifty-nine seconds."

A day, he thinks as he coughs up water.

"You are almost there," Itachi says congenially. As if they are two strangers discussing the weather. Nothing can affect him.

His head is pushed back into the white pool.

-

The city is leveled around him. Boundaries between what used to be street and used to be building have blurred as rubble covers everything. Dust hangs heavy in the air, obscuring the brilliant blue of the sky.

He stands in front of the village gates and faces the six cloaked figures in front of him. He can just barely see their silhouettes through the ash flecks and dirt that spin in plumes with the breeze. For a second, the sun breaks through the grime and hits his face.

Pein must have figured out the ruse by now. There is no blood among the broken buildings. No screams cut through silence. The redwoods creak in the distance and he smiles under his mask. The village is empty.

Finally a sound: a howl of rage. The breeze fades for a second before coming back with the power of a gale. It radiates from the center of Konoha, lifting the dust off the ground and finally revealing the ruins in their entirety.

They see him. Six bodies turn to face him and he lets the illusion drop. The stoic face of the youngest Kazekage to date drips off him like wax and all that is left are the seals glowing on his skin and his father's tanto in his hands.

The toads would not abandon their summoners even after their death. They have prepared this for months. The village should be hidden deep in the wastes of Suna by now, guarded by a veritable army as all the nations unite. At this moment, squads of ninja are attacking the

remaining members of Akatsuki, hunting for the statue containing the tailed beasts, destroying the foundations of the organization that sought this world's downfall.

There are millions of frogs crouched under the eternal rain of Ame. They have heard the whispers and relayed them. Even the animal gods have stake in this war.

He had a plan. The Kazekage had an impenetrable defense. The Mizukage brought sharp toothed fighters that could navigate the underwater maze of pipes in Ame. The Tsuchikage had a perfect position so they could crush the enemy on both sides. The Raikage loaned their small population of descendants from the Uzushio-gakure residents who had not been killed in the invasion.

Twenty genjutsu experts from various nations pieced together a shell for him. The Kazekage patiently filled seals with jinchuuriki chakra that would cover his skin like a film. They spread rumors of the Kazekage and Hokage meeting in Konoha.

The trap was set and he was the bait.

(And the bait rarely survives a creature like this.)

He tightens his grip on his father's tanto and steps forward. The six paths of Pein meet him in the middle. Lightning crackles through the sky as they—

-

“Thirty-one hours, twenty-six minutes, and thirty-seven seconds.”

It's devolved into a waiting game now. Itachi stares down at him and there is nothing to him. No boredom or apathy or cruel curiosity masquerading under a porcelain face. Even neutrality seems too large a term to encompass the lack of depth in his unseeing eyes.

His heart seizes and he dies again.

-

His breath wheezes out of his lungs in shallow bursts, like he can no longer pull oxygen from the broken landscape around him. The dust is back and it clings to his clothes. Sweat drips down his neck as the sun slowly dips down behind the remains of the village wall.

Shukaku created the steps needed to defeat each of the paths. The toads described Jiraiya's final battle in detail. They were each characterized by one or two abilities, and the order in which they were killed was the key to actually beating them in a fight. If he missed one cue, the whole operation would fall to pieces.

Send a barrage of kunai towards the Deva path. Shunshin to the left of the group and spit out a fireball. Hide another volley of kunai in the flames. Shunshin in while the Deva and Preta paths were distracted and cut down the Nakara. After this, everything will click into place.

The Deva path pulls the Human path into the way of a Fuuton Release. Bury a shadow clone under the rubble and watch it erupt behind the Animal path. The two-headed dog summon bursts into a cloud of steam. Create two more clones to barrage the Preta path. Flicker to the Asura path and almost fall out of step as its saw blade twists around. Cover it in strips of exploding tags and blink away. Watch the Preta path try to absorb the blast.

A shadow clone sticks its hand through the Preta path's chest.

Electricity arcs through the air. Two clones go up in smoke with the chakra backlash. One more. Pull a wall of stone from the ground and use the cover to sink into the earth.

He gathers the dregs of chakra flickering through his system and lets Obito's eye bloom. The Deva path falters as the remaining clone charges it and erupts with a clap of thunder. He tastes iron and plasma in the air as static crackles. It turns to face him and stops.

The path stumbles to the side with wide eyes. Blood runs down his face as most of its torso disappears.

And now he is here, back against a crumbling wall watching the sun set. His left eye is sealed shut with dried blood and his chest shakes with small inhalations. Chakra exhaustion squeezes his head like a vice. He can almost feel his internal organs shutting down.

He dipped low in his reserves and overrode his body's limitations by cracking open his gates. He pants for breath in the dusty ruins of Konoha and think of his friends, his kids, his village. The Deva path jerked to a halt even before he tore its chest out. They must have found the Akatsuki's leaders. They must have won.

A flicker of chakra among the rubble. He hopes no one came back for him. He doesn't want anyone he cares for to see him now. Dogs go out into the woods to die and he is no different.

There is no hiss of displaced air, just the sound of boots on broken stone. Someone making their presence known.

A whistle. A tune he barely remembers. The image of sitting next to Minato and listening to Rin hum while she paints seals on explosive tags emerges from the depths of his memory. He hadn't realized his

right eye had fallen shut to match his left.

He opens it with effort and looks at the figure in front of him. His hand around his father's tanto twitches, but no strength remains in his limbs. He can't feel his legs at this point. Dust puffs off his mask with each of his shallow exhalations.

The figure crouches in front of him. He watches the tomoe of a burning red eye spin, spin, spin. A scarred hand reaches up and he cannot jerk away when the figure brushes dark ash out of his hair. Low laughter echoes out from behind the swirling orange mask.

"You've gotten stronger, Bakashi."

The fingers on his left hand curl inwards like a dying insect. Something wet sticks to the back of his throat. He has no energy left to even growl.

"I always thought we would end up fighting. Maybe you would have listened to my plan. We could have brought back Rin and Sensei together."

The hand in his hair is shaking. It would be imperceptible, but all of his nerve endings seem to have migrated to the inside of his skull. He tries to speak but cannot make his jaw move.

He must make a sound because one of the scarred hands takes a hold of the orange mask and lifts it. He sees a pale face marred with thick lines of scar tissue, a mouth twisted with emotion, soft black hair plastered to the man's forehead. A Sharingan pinwheels slowly across from a ringed purple eye.

“Don’t need this anymore,” the man says. He sets the mask down against the fractured cobble street. “You’re the last person who knows who I am.”

And he—

-

“Twenty-three hours, fifty-nine minutes, and fifty-eight seconds.”

Sparks catch and the pyre—

-

“I saw Gai again,” the man says. “He was part of the group attacking Ame. You’ll see him soon”

The sky fills with color as the sun sinks—

-

“Fourteen hours, seven minutes, and forty-three seconds.”

He cannot breathe—

-

“They never made it inside the base. Thanks for dealing with the paths, though. I could never have killed Pein if you hadn’t. He was losing faith in the plan and I needed his eye.”

In the distance, a roof caves in—

-

“Ten hours, fifty-one minutes, and twenty-five seconds.”

Smoke rises—

-

“I was going to come for you. It’s a really long story and you deserve to hear it. But you know me, late to everything.”

He cannot feel his arms—

-

“Six hours, fifty-five minutes, and twelve seconds.”

The blade comes down—

-

“Everything’s almost ready. I’ll bring you back. We can talk then, with Rin and Sensei. Kushina too. Everyone who died today. We will break out of this circle of violence and get our happy ending.”

The man, Obito, drops from his crouch to sit across from him. His father’s tanto falls out of his open hand and clatters against the ground—

-

“Two hours, eighteen minutes, and fifty seconds.”

He’s drowning again—

-

“I’ll miss you, Bakashi.”

He feels his stolen eye blink open. Water mixes with the flecks of blood clinging to his eyelashes and falls down his cheek. Across from him, Obito’s red eye has faded to black. The tears streaming from it shine under the last light of dusk.

He was always such a crybaby.

-

“Zero.”

-

He snaps awake and reaches for a knife, scrabbling at his sheets. His breath is coming out in aborted gasps. He needs to get up, needs to find out what happened, needs to escape the spinning, red eyes—

“Todoroki?” A sleep-scratchy voice from his side says.

He whips around, tries to open Obito’s eye. Darkness surrounds him,

closes down on him, and it is squeezing his throat. He can see nothing.

The teenager on his right leverages himself up. “Todoroki,” he whispers, “are you okay?”

He is suddenly aware of his heartbeat thundering in his chest. He stares at the dim outline of the kid in front of him. His hand has not stopped digging through his sheets. Distantly, he realizes that he is in a crouch, both legs tensed and ready to move.

“Todoroki?” The teenager asks again. Someone’s snores peter off and another person shuffles. The boy leans in, eyes narrowed in concern over his mask and—

It’s Shouji.

“Bathroom,” Todoroki says and walks out of the room. As soon as the door shuts behind him, he staggers, stumbling to the door marked ‘men’s’.

He tucks himself under the sinks. His back is pressed against cold tile and his knees smack against pipes and he focuses on these sensations. Tries to escape the taste of dust and ash and copper. Tries to forget fading warmth and numbness and the sharp points of shattered masonry digging into his sides.

His fingers fist into his hair and he chokes on air. The fist around his neck tightens and his blood rushes against his eardrums and rampant terror snaps at the shaky threads of rational thought he is trying to stitch together.

“My name is Todoroki Shouto. I am sixteen years old as of January eleventh. One hundred and seventy-six centimeters tall, seventy-three kilograms. Blood type O.”

A circle of panic traps him inside his head. Flashes of memory form a disjointed slide show of gory scenes. Lightening flashes and his hand carves through a chest and she whispers in his ear, “Kakas—”

His breath hitches and his hands tighten, pulling on his hair. “My name is Todoroki Shouto. I am with my classmates at a training camp. It is our second night here. There are pro-heroes downstairs. It is fine. We are safe here.”

In seven, hold seven, out seven. Unlucky for anything except staving off anxiety. “My name is Todoroki Shouto—”

The door to the bathrooms bangs open and anger-issues, Bakugou, walks inside.

“Wha’ the fuck?”

This is the nightmare scenario.

Bakugou stares at him. “The fuck’s wrong with you?”

Todoroki’s shoulders involuntarily pull in. He is breathing fast and he can feel his knuckles turning white from where they are tangled on top of his head. The litany he is trying to keep repeating in his mind, the assurance that everything will be fine, falters and the anxiety kicks back in. Adrenaline makes him shaky, makes him small and tired and ruined for everything in this world.

“I,” Todoroki says through gritted teeth, “am in the middle of something.”

He tries to project hostility in hopes that it will make Bakugou leave. Even before his words come out weak, he knows this will not work. If anything, Bakugou is drawn to fury like a suicidal moth. It’s hard to recoil from something that is one of your defining characteristics.

Bakugou wanders closer. “Looks like you’re in the middle of some bullshit. You’re sitting under the fucking sink in the dark.”

“I’m aware.” His voice cracks.

The other boy sneers at him. He drops into a squat in front of Todoroki, blocking his view of the door. When Todoroki does not acknowledge him, he leans in. “Is this your damage or something? You like sitting on shitty bathroom floors, cyclops?”

This is really not helping. His eyes are focused on Bakugou’s chest, a direct line to where the door should be. He knows rationally that he is taller than the kid, broader and heavier and stronger than he is. But right now he is caged into the corner. The previously reassuring, grounding, sensation of two walls at his back has turned into a trap.

He pulls his hands out of his hair and threads his fingers together over his knees. Strands of white hair gleam under the pale moon shining through the skylight. He did not even feel when he ripped them out.

“Could you leave?” It’s barely a question. He is slipping into himself and everything around him feels *less*. White noise hums in his ears as he starts to slowly trip back into cyclical dread.

“Oi, are you even paying attention to me?” Bakugou’s voice shreds through both the white noise and his concentration on breathing steadily.

The invisible fist around his throat twists and his next inhale scrapes against the back of his mouth. Black spots bloom across his vision as he starts to hyperventilate. He would take a punctured lung any day. He would fight Stain with his arms tied behind his back. He would throw himself towards packs of Noumu just to escape his current situation. Physical pain is nothing compared to the gut-wrenching mortification of falling apart in front of his classmate.

“Wait, fuck—” Bakugou’s dropped one hand to the grimy bathroom floor and balances on it as he leans in. His eyebrows draw together and his eyes go wide. “Oh shit, what the hell—hold on, you weren’t—fucking Christ.”

He reaches out with his other hand and Todoroki cannot stop his reaction. He is drowning in memory and blind with emotion. He grabs the hand before it touches his shoulder and pulls, yanking Bakugou off balance and sending him crashing to the floor. He breathes in small gasps and tries to collect enough scraps of logical thought together to say something, anything.

Bakugou stares at him from the floor, holding his hand to his chest. “I’m—I’ll get Aizawa. He—”

“No,” Todoroki coughs out of his useless lungs. He is so close to his goal, just months away from everything falling into place. He cannot stop now, cannot *be* stopped now. He has plans to carry out, a shifting mass of strings to pull at, organizations to disband and legislation to force through and articles to write and a world to change, to make better so those he cares about will thrive. If someone stops him now, years of schemes will implode into nothing and he will have to start

over.

“No,” he fights for air. “I’m fine.”

“The hell you’re fine. Are you crying?”

He’s not. He hasn’t cried for years.

Bakugou sits up but stays back, out of arm’s reach. “Do you... need something?” He sounds lost, the usual rasp of his voice wobbly. He speaks like a man knocked off balance and reeling.

It makes sense. Todoroki is supposed to have his shit together. He has the second best grades in the class (for lack of trying), the highest combat scores, the record for entrance exam points, and a tournament win that he barely worked for. He knows four languages, fights like he does not even need his Quirk, completes homework weeks before it is due. He is wrapped in scar tissue and missing an eye and constantly hiding his face. He’s mysterious and strong and *better*.

He is also gagging on perfectly useable oxygen on a cold bathroom floor in the middle of the night. To someone who has only witnessed his unaffected mask and the ease of all his actions, this must be unsettling. Suddenly realizing the person you despise because they will not acknowledge you as a challenge is a human, with strengths and weaknesses and emotions, is uncomfortable. It is very hard to hate someone when you discover they are more than the straw man you built in your head.

“You could fuck off,” Todoroki suggests. There is no heat in his words. He is too distracted trying to think to be angry.

“You could fuck off.’ Who do you think you are, shitty cyclops? Tell me what you want and stop—” Bakugou gestures at him, as if to encompass his whole panic attack. It’s funny how unbalanced he is. Todoroki has never seen Bakugou so unsure of himself.

“Your phone.” He digs a hand back into his hair and tightens his fingers, grounds himself with the sharp spots of pain.

“What?”

“Your. Phone. Or leave,” he hisses. Imagined dust coats his palms and he tries to scratch the feeling off on the pilling knees of his sweatpants.

Bakugou slowly reaches into his pocket and pulls out his phone. He unlocks it with a snarl and passes it over. Todoroki’s hands tremble as he opens Google and types in the search bar. There is a single, miraculous bar of cell service.

He opens an article on the Ottoman-German alliance and loses himself in the text. The history is foreign enough, well recorded and devoid of propaganda, that it distracts him. By the time he reaches a paragraph on Wilhelm II’s declaration at the Mausoleum of Saladin, his chest no longer feels unbearably tight.

He breathes in, out. Counts to ten. Counts to ten again. He relaxes the hand buried in his hair and drags his palm down, over his face. In seven, hold seven, out seven. It is going to be okay. He is safe here. They are safe here.

Todoroki tosses the phone back to Bakugou and smiles when he fumbles it with a curse. The adrenaline has faded from his system and he is empty without it, exhausted with lead filling his bones.

“What kind of nerdy shit is this, cyclops?” Bakugou scrolls through the article. “God, you’re such a loser.”

Todoroki unbends his legs from their position huddled against his chest. He stretches out the ground and stares at the sink plumbing in front of him. The bathroom tile is cool against the back of his head.

“So what the fuck was that?”

He debates brushing Bakugou off. That might make him angry or more curious or something. He might take it as an invitation to start yelling again and Todoroki is dead tired. The press of gravity on his shoulders is inescapable.

“A dream,” he says and closes his eye. A drop of water that has been threatening to fall from the counter above him finally does. It lands in Bakugou’s wild hair.

“Bullshit. Dreams don’t do *that*.” Bakugou’s face is twisted up. Todoroki faintly hopes that it gets stuck like that. That would be hilarious.

He hums and drifts in the overwhelming calm. Bakugou shoves a finger in his side and Todoroki opens his eye to look at him.

“Damn, that is fucking gross.” Bakugou is staring at him. At his eye socket, he realizes. He lets the torn eyelid fall shut. Bakugou sneers.

They sit on the dirty bathroom floor in silence. A thought drifts

through Todoroki's head. A reminder he made for himself a while back but never acted on.

"Hey," he says and rolls his head to the side to face Bakugou, "what the fuck is wrong with you by the way."

Bakugou glares at him. "I just walked in on you sitting under a sink and you ask what's fucking wrong with me?"

"When you hit Midoriya. During the team exercise." Todoroki watches Bakugou bristle.

"You want to go, cyclops bastard? I don't give a shit what kinds of dreams you had I'll take you right here, right now."

Todoroki flaps a hand at him. "Maa, not now. I'll beat you tomorrow."

"You can barely move your arms how the fuck are you gonna beat me!"

He shoves his palm in Bakugou's face and pushes him back. The other boy's fists smoke but he ignores him, instead sliding out from under the counter and standing. Bakugou swears on the floor and bares his teeth. Todoroki puts his hands in his pockets. His shoulders drop and he huffs an almost laugh as Bakugou scrambles up to his feet.

Todoroki turns to the door and waves over his shoulder. "Night, anger-issues."

“Eat shit, cyclops.” He hears behind him. His mouth twitches into a small smile.

Todoroki takes the stairs down from the dorms and wanders through the empty halls of the inn. He passes by the common room and takes a second to peer through the large windows. Shadows shift under swaying trees. Light from the moon shines on leaves, turning the canopy a dull silver. The shape of an animal disappears deeper into the woods. It is quiet.

There is a yellow light glowing in the kitchen when he enters it. Tora sits at the table across from the door with a steaming mug in his giant palms. He stares at Todoroki standing in the doorway. The lamp in the corner flickers.

Tora sighs heavily. “Want some tea?”

Todoroki nods and walks over to the table. Tora stands up and scratches his stomach as he pulls a mug from a cabinet. The kitchen sink turns on. Water rushes out with a hiss. Tora turns the tap off when the mug overflows and puts in the microwave. He punches a number in and roots through a drawer for tea bags.

“Genmaicha?”

“Sure.”

The microwave whirs in the background. Tora leans back against the counter and considers him. Todoroki tilts his head and stares back.

Tora is a veritable mountain of a man, with broad shoulders and

bulging muscles. He is wearing a white t-shirt that has the seam cut off at the bottom so the edge rolls up. His pajama pants are patterned with napping cats. Without his mask, he looks softer, less like he is ready to fight at any given minute.

Todoroki would try to watch for the shift of his abs underneath his thin shirt, but he is tired right now. He lays his face on his crossed arms and wonders why attractive men appear at the worst times. As Hagakure would say, he is literally dying.

A mechanical beep. Tora turns back to the microwave to take the cup out. He tears the wrapper off a teabag and wraps the string around the mug's handle, looping it underneath itself so it will not fall into the water.

He slides Todoroki the cup and sits back down. Todoroki eyes the clouds of green seeping into the water. Tora lifts his own mug and Todoroki watches him tilt his head back. The man has a cleft lip. Todoroki can see the white of his teeth through the open seam.

Todoroki knows a lot about Tora, and none of it from his father. He is not interested in the man's hero group, rather his career.

Tora is part of a handful of LGBT heroes to come out to the public. No. 13 is the only other one who is ranked in the top hundred. There is very little representation and a lot of prejudice. Todoroki remembers the paper headlines when Tora reappeared to the public after his transition. All Might was constantly in the streets during the week the articles ran. Though he never delivered a public announcement, the Number One hero made an effort to take the spotlight away from the Pussycats and hopefully divert the slander.

The Wild, Wild Pussycats rarely do interviews. When they have, they refuse all questions about their personal lives, concentrating only on

their jobs. Todoroki has only seen two types of articles about the man: the ones that talk about him crudely or the ones that put him on a pedestal.

The man is at the forefront of queer representation in the hero industry, but does not use his position to promote equality. In the only solo interview Todoroki could find of him, Tora said that his job is to save people, not be a symbol. He just wants to perform his duties as a hero. Preferably far out of the media's line of sight.

Todoroki can understand this. It must be very difficult to be deified by a certain group and spat on by another. Just because someone is a part of a minority does not mean they have the desire to or are qualified to become a social advocate. Some people just want to live their lives without anyone placing duties on top of them.

As far as Todoroki knows, Tora has never interacted with LGBT kids who want to be heroes. Whether this is due to the man's intimidating presence or lack of contact, he does not know. But Todoroki does have a question. The differences between these worlds are alarming. His hair is soft and the galaxies have names and history has been recorded for thousands of years. People view sexuality and gender differently.

"How hard is it exactly," he says into his mug, "to come out and still work as a hero?"

The lamp flickers and steam rises from the hot tea. Tora sets his cup down.

He cradles his chin in a giant palm. "Depends, what are you?"

"Gay," Todoroki replies.

Tora frowns and through his cleft lip, Todoroki can see his red gums. “Bet Endeavor hated that.”

Todoroki is surprised into laughing. It’s quiet, muffled by his mask, but it is nice. Much preferable to how he felt half an hour ago. “Yeah.”

He doesn’t think Endeavor is homophobic, exactly. Well, he is but not because he is inherently hateful of LGBT. Endeavor was used to having absolute control over his son’s life. When he did not live up to Endeavor’s exacting expectations, violence was the default method to make him better. They conditioned each other. When he did not perform a move right, Endeavor would attack him to show him how he was incorrect. The next time, he would do better.

So when he finally grew tired of a smile with too many teeth spitting questions that didn’t apply to him, when he finally came out, he broke out of the mold Endeavor stuffed him in. And the man acted to the loss of control in the only way he knew how.

“Your friends know?”

He nods.

“And they support you?”

“Yeah.”

Tora blows steam off his tea. “As long as you do your job well and have friends who care about you, nothing else matters.” He takes a sip

from his mug and smiles, lips curling like a Cheshire. “It will be hard, but just remember whose opinion actually matters. You’ll be fine.”

Todoroki thinks back to twitter rants and open homes and advice given freely. He remembers Shouji bringing coffee in the mornings and Satou loaning him clothes and Kouda sending photos of dogs he passed on the street and Tokoyami glaring at Bakugou on his behalf. And there’s more, even more faces flashing through his mind. Midoriya beaming as clouds form and Hagakure drawing kaomojis on his arms in the hospital and Kirishima directing Kaminari’s questions away and Yaoyorozu’s congratulations and the face Ojiro makes when he picks up a Judo move in minutes.

Fuyumi taping his camp itinerary to the fridge and filling the cupboards with the cereal she remembered he likes. Aizawa awkwardly sitting in the middle of a reptile café. Present Mic’s loose hair. All three of their expressions when faced with Endeavor’s actions.

Love is a big word and Todoroki does not like to touch it. Love is for things larger than he is. It also tends to end badly for him, with the amount of funerals he has attended. But he realizes that he likes his life here, likes the people around him. He is something very close to happy, almost at contentment. He is going to be okay.

“Plus Ultra,” Tora says and drinks the rest of his tea.

Todoroki smiles under his mask. He is going to be fine. They are all going to be fine.

Chapter End Notes

"Don't need this anymore," the man says. He sets the mask down against the fractured cobble street. "You're the last person who knows who I am."

Okay, Naruto info in sequential order for the flashback for people who haven't watched it:

Jiraiya took Naruto on a three year training trip. It worked to both keep him safe, but also teach him the skill necessary to protect himself against the Akatsuki (guys who pretty much want to take over the world) and Orochimaru (snake dude kidnapped Sasuke).

Change: Akatsuki was able to mobilize by year two and attacked Jiraiya and Naruto. Jiraiya canonically dies to Pein (the "leader"). In my fic, they fight Pein, Konan, Itachi, and Kisame. Even a jinchuuriki cannot hold up against that. Black edged scrolls are used to hold a person's remains.

Danzo is a fucked up old dude who is really big on the greater good, kidnapping children and conditioning them (Root), starting wars to make Konoha better, and pretty much being a dick. He likes power and once 'solved' an internal issue where the Uchiha were thinking of trying a coup by murdering every single one of them except for one kid (Sasuke). He made Itachi, Sasuke's older brother, carry out the murders and also stole Sharingan eyes from their corpses. He comes into power after Pein's attack on Konoha. Change: Danzo deposed Tsunade while Kakashi was away and made 'military dictatorship' sound like a nice term. In turn, Kakashi leaked the truth behind the Uchiha Incident. Sasuke killed Orochimaru early and went to kill Danzo. He did not try to get revenge on Itachi, instead taking off and (not mentioned in this chapter) later joining up with the relocated Konoha.

Pein comes to grab Naruto and destroys the entirety of Konoha in his process. They have a big battle, featuring the six paths of Pein, and basically everyone dies before Naruto goes shounen anime protag and punches sense into Pein. Pein then raises everyone from the dead, sacrificing himself. I think. I stopped at episode 425 or something and never finished. Im 90% sure its accurate.

Change: The frogs, pissed off they lost both summoners, help Kakashi and crew create a plan. They manage to team up with the other nations, move the populations of the village out to Suna, and lay a trap. Gaara (one-tailed jinchuuriki) has not been captured so they leak he is going to meet with Kakashi in Konoha. Kakashi disguises himself as Gaara, lures Pein in, and kills his paths, trusting the forces invading Ame to take care of his real body. As he's dying, Obito (his teammate who he thought died 18 years ago) reveals he is actually a member of the Akatsuki. He was recruited by Madara, something something, and is trying to

create 'Infinite Tsukuyomi' where everything will be good for everyone. He tells Kakashi that everyone who attacked Ame is dead (including Gai) and that Kakashi's plan failed.

Also, canonically Tsunade healed Kakashi's psychological damage from Tsukuyomi but that really doesn't make sense to me. It is mental damage, not physical, and while Tsunade is incredible, I don't think she could do that instantly? Let me know what you think!

Thank you for coming to my info-dump. Alright, so it's 3:00am and I don't really feel like writing that much meta. This is going to be very disjointed. Good luck.

Bakugou character growth! Tora! Todokashi opening up about some small facets of his life to an adult he thinks is really cool! I really love Tora guys. When I saw his character sheet after that manga chapter, I was shaking in my boots. I headcannon homophobia is still apparent in mainstream media, but there is definitely a push from the younger generation to change this. Tora's reluctance to become a spokesperson for LGBT rights comes from what I've experienced. But Todokashi knows that because of Endeavor, his Quirk, and his abilities, he is going to be in the public spotlight much more than he would want. While he can hide his sexuality, he doesn't want to. He just wants to live his best life. Mostly. Probably? He wants to have a good personal life but is willing to sacrifice a lot of things for his professional life (including time, sleep, and health but excluding who he is as a person).

Next chapter is going to be fun. Yup. Get ready for Hagakure, Todokashi banter, and a fight scene I tried to choreograph irl but my dogs thought that kicking at the air meant I wanted to play with them. Also, um. Todokashi gets angry. I'll see you next weekend! <3

Fight! (Reprisal)

Chapter Notes

hello, please mind the violence tags

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Hagakure's worst day happened three years ago when she was arrested. She had terrible days before that, days where no matter what she did no one would look at her. Days when she didn't feel like enough. She was invisible, both because of her Quirk and because no one paid attention.

She despised it for the first eleven years of her life. Her file is probably littered with red marks, incidents where she acted out to get people to finally notice her. And they did, for the brief moment. Then it went back to normal.

So she was loud. Negative attention is still attention, and she was starved for validation. She wore polka-dots on top of stripes, dressed bright pink one day and in a rainbow riot the next. She cracked jokes too loudly and taught her classmates swears adults unknowingly said around her and deliberately forgot her homework. When she was excited, she shrieked. When she was angry, she screeched and kicked. When the teachers finally decided enough was enough and yelled at her, her face broke into a smile they couldn't see.

Sometimes she didn't even have to go to detention. Someone would make a mental note to send her and just forget. No one would notice.

And then someone finally did.

Her name was Atsuko. She had USB plugs for thumbs and could digitize memories if you held her hand. She transferred in Hagakure's

sixth year and made a name for herself immediately.

She was cold, mean, and vicious. But she saw Hagakure when no one else would.

And back then, when no one noticed Hagakure unless she got in their face, when the teachers wouldn't call on her in class, when her parents didn't look at her, Hagakure didn't care that Atsuko only talked to her because she was useful.

Suddenly, invisibility was outrageously useful. But it wasn't really invisibility, Atsuko told her, it was the ability to bend light around herself and potentially, other objects. They worked on it, practiced everyday after school and Hagakure finally had a friend.

They started with smaller objects, things Hagakure could put in her mouth and just walk out with. Then they started getting bigger. And then Hagakure needed to gain muscle, because TVs wouldn't haul themselves out of department stores.

Hagakure's worst day was three years ago when she was caught with a pile of fancy clothes under her arms. She didn't talk about Atsuko then, even when the police knew she had an accomplice. She didn't talk because Atsuko was her friend and Hagakure believed with all her heart that Atsuko would come for her. She would walk into the holding cell and shove aside the detectives that were staring at her with pity in their eyes and she would grab Hagakure's hand and everything would go back to normal.

Instead, Atusko switched school again. Her number changed and the apartment her parents were never at was rented out by a family of four. She didn't quite disappear, because that would be suspicious, but she did a damn good job of dropping all connections.

Hagakure's file gained a significant amount of weight over night. She never saw the money Atsuko promised her from reselling, even if she cared less about it than the girl's company. She lost her parent's trust, her only friend, and most of her freedoms. She got two hundred hours of community service, a therapist, a new school with much more wary teachers, and the disappointment of almost all the adults she knew.

Hagakure fought every fucking inch to clear those marks from her record. She studied harder, volunteered every day, followed each of the stupid rules now imposed on her. She obeyed curfew, lifted weights in her room, worked on city clean up projects, did all her therapy exercises, and gritted her teeth when her teachers pointed her out.

"That's the delinquent girl," they said.

Hagakure yelled into her pillow and took up kick boxing.

She managed to apply for U.A. by the skin of her teeth. She filled out the additional essays on the application, describing in detail what she got in trouble for and how she rectified her behavior. How much she regretted her actions. She obtained references from the volunteer organizations she worked with. She wrote down her near perfect G.P.A. with pride.

Hagakure walked out of the physical exam with thick cuts on her hands from ripping the heads off robots. She swallowed the paper cup of aspirin Recover Girl gave her and wrote as much as she could on the test.

When she received her letter of acceptance, she screamed for a solid minute.

Hagakure's worst day of her life was three years ago when she was finally caught for a long series of mistakes she had made.

But today almost eclipses that.

-

“Hey, um, Todoroki?”

He looks down from the bowl of water he is carrying. Midoriya is crouched by a fire pit, stacking logs on top of each other.

“Hm?” His eyelid is heavy when he blinks. He never did manage to go to sleep again last night. After Tora left the kitchen, he returned to the communal bedroom, waved off Shouji's mumbled concern, and put his earbuds in. He watched the shifting patterns of light on the ceiling while the international news channel rattled on about another Quirkless discrimination act passed in Korea.

Midoriya picks up his stack of wood and walks over to the next fire pit. “You know Kouta?”

“Who?”

“Mandalay's nephew. He should be right over—” Midoriya starts to point across the clearing and stops. “Huh, he must be at his hideout.”

He turns back to the fire pit. “He really, really doesn’t like us. He has something against Quirks and heroes and I couldn’t get him to understand. I mean, his parents were heroes.”

Todoroki very much does not want to touch this. Midoriya turns to him with bright, hopeful eyes. “What do you think I should do? You’re really good with words.”

He doubts that. “Well,” he says and shifts the bowl of water in his hands, “it depends on what you want to hear.”

“Huh?”

“Do you want the answer someone like All Might would give, or the more realistic one.” He remembers an infant similar to the one Midoriya is describing. Dead parents, a need to be alone, rude, tendency to talk about things Todoroki doesn’t really care about. Of course, Wave was a poverty-stricken nation under the iron fist of a business mongrel who cared more for making money as quickly as possible than sustainable economic practices. But pain is relative. Or something like that.

Midoriya just blinks at him.

“The heroic thing to say would be something along the lines of ‘You’re a stranger to him. People don’t want to listen to strangers they know nothing about, so become his friend.’ Or maybe, ‘Show him, don’t tell him.’”

He thinks back to Naruto screaming about the prejudice he went through and Sasuke trying to one-up him, like suffering was a competition. He doesn’t like to compare what he went through to others. With the exception of maybe Itachi, he is the most tragic

person he knows. But no one should celebrate that.

“The answer I personally would give you, the most realistic one, is that this is not your fight. Do you think you could convince him to change the opinion he developed from a traumatic experience when Mandalay, his own aunt, can’t? If the people who are raising him right now, who are actual pro-heroes actively risking their lives for the safety of others, can’t change his mind, how can you?”

“Mandalay must still be grieving her sister’s death. They have that in common. They’ll recover from this together. After he’s done grieving, he’ll feel bad about saying these things. But it takes time.”

He looks back at Midoriya and finds the kid staring at him, wide-eyed.

Iida yells in the distance and Todoroki turns away. “What he probably needs is therapy.”

There’s a hack in the distance, like someone choked on their own spit. Todoroki twists his head around. Aizawa had been standing within earshot of their conversation. His teacher is staring into the distance, still coughing and practically radiating exasperation.

He doesn’t know what elicited this reaction, but he doesn’t want to find out. Iida calls again. Todoroki starts walking over to where Shouji is peeling three carrots at the same time.

-

“No waaaay!” Mina wails as she is pulled away by Aizawa. The other four who failed the exam squirm against the scarf wrapped around

their torso. Todoroki winces in pity as Satou gets a mouthful of dirt. Additional training must be painful.

“Okay, kitties!” Pixie-bob cheers to the rest of class 1-A and 1-B in the clearing. She punches the air in excitement. “Class B will be on offensive first. Class A will pair up and enter the forest every three minutes. It should only take fifteen minutes to grab your name card at the halfway point and come back!”

“A banquet of darkness,” Tokoyami whispers by Todoroki’s side. Shouji nods in sympathy. Apparently, the last time Tokoyami went on a haunted house tour, there was a jump scare that made him lose control of Dark Shadow. From the pictures taped to Shouji’s wall, it was not a good experience.

The Pussycats explain the rest of the rules and class B heads into the forest. Ragdoll passes out lots. Tokoyami makes a pleased noise as he and Shouji both draw the number one. Kouda waves to Iida, who is brandishing seven fingers in the air.

Yaoyorozu and Aoyama are talking together. Uraraka and Tsuyu are standing next to Jirou and Hagakure. Ojiro grimaces as Mineta tries to interrupt Yaoyorozu’s conversation. Midoriya has followed Iida’s example and holds eight of his fingers up.

And Bakugou is scowling at him. Todoroki turns the scrap of paper for his classmate to see and Bakugou crushes his own lot with a smoking fist. They keep five feet of space between themselves as Tokoyami and Shouji enter the forest.

Three minutes tick by without either of them saying a word. Pixie-bob ushers them forward with a wiggle of her clawed fingers and they step into the forest.

It gets dark quickly. Ancient oaks branch over their heads and the temperature drops. Todoroki is glad he thought to steal one of Tokoyami's black jackets. The sleeves are a few inches too short, but it is warm.

Wind creeps through the trees and Bakugou shivers. He catches Todoroki eying him and snaps. "The fuck you lookin' at?"

Todoroki shrugs. The silence is thick and everything he does not say weighs heavy in his gut. A part of him wants to discuss what happened last night. The rest of his being demands he represses that memory as deep as he can.

"Nice weather," he says instead, because the quiet is grating. And because he is an ass. Bakugou puffs up immediately and Todoroki grins under his mask.

"Eat shit and die," Bakugou growls. "You wanna fucking talk about your feelings?" He sneers the words impressively. Todoroki can practically taste the scorn.

"I love connecting to my peers on an emotional level," Todoroki deadpans.

"Bullshit," Bakugou snaps back.

"Has anyone told you that you're very eloquent?"

"I'll kill you. I'll do it."

“Maa Bakugou, you’re so grumpy. Is it because you can’t wear gloves?”

“You wanna fucking go?” Bakugou turns to him and his palms crackle. The sparks of lit nitroglycerin are bright under the trees. “You piss me off. How the hell can you turn from sniveling wreck to complete asshole so fast?”

Todoroki runs a hand through his hair. “It’s a talent.”

This is fun. He used to avoid Bakugou, not even thinking about him by name. Too many bad memories of other small children with inferiority complexes. But where Sasuke was overflowing with revenge, Bakugou is different. There are unexpected depths to him. He grasps for power but doesn’t tear himself apart to achieve it.

He’s an unapologetically virulent and not a good person. He bullies people because he feels superior and takes competition too far. He is built of fury and spits vitriol at any opportunity, but anger is a secondary emotion. It’s like a breeze blowing through a small hole in the back of a cave. It promises something if you just dig for it.

Todoroki isn’t going to dig for it, though. Not right now, at least. He doesn’t like Bakugou by any means, has no interest in being his friend. But it is fun to banter with him. To wind him up and watch him explode. He is slower to attack now, after their last conversation. It’s hilarious and, well, Todoroki does not get to be a dick to people often.

“Yeah right. You still never told me what the hell that was.”
Bakugou’s palms are bleeding plumes of ash and his teeth are bared, but his irritation is empty. It’s like it is the only way he knows how to communicate with people, by yelling at them until they give him what

he wants. But he has discovered Todoroki does not comply like others do and it's throwing him.

“Ah, I believe that was what you would call,” Todoroki pauses and pretends to think, “‘Not your fucking business’.”

A small explosion pops. He raises his eyebrow and looks down at Bakugou. The kid shoves his sweating palms in his pockets and slouches. “Fuck you,” he says.

“Would you rather have a talk about our feelings? We can hold hands if you want.” He is smiling and it is obvious even with his mask. His eye has curled into a crescent.

“Fuck off, cyclops. That’s pretty gay.”

Todoroki shrugs and follows Bakugou’s example by tucking his hands in the pockets of Tokoyami’s jacket. “I’m pretty gay.”

“Good for you.” Bakugou ignores him. He grins all teeth when they see the shape of someone move through the tree line. “Let’s go beat the shit out of these extras.

Surprisingly, whoever was hiding in the trees does not try to jump out and startle them. They must have realized they were spotted and gone to the next group, Todoroki thinks.

It takes another three minutes before they face their first scare of the night. A girl rises out of the ground in front of him. The movement is so sudden Todoroki twitches.

“Oh.” Bakugou jolts to a halt. They both stare as the girl smiles and sinks back down. Snickering comes from the bushes on either side of the path.

The rest of the attempts are not as good as the first. Todoroki tries to keep his breathing even as Hagakure’s shrieks echo out of the forest behind them. She likes to be scared, he reminds himself. Her collection of horror movies takes up a whole shelf. She’s not in danger.

Ragdoll greets them enthusiastically from the middle checkpoint and tries to hand Todoroki their card. Bakugou snatches it instead and crams it into his pocket. Todoroki lazily blinks at his snarl. Bakugou flips him off and takes the lead.

Two minutes later, Todoroki reaches out and snags the back of Bakugou’s collar. He flails wildly and almost falls as Todoroki lets go. “WHAT?” He screeches.

Todoroki reaches out in front of them and taps a fingernail against a sheet of solid air. “Brown-hair from 1-B.”

Bakugou grinds his teeth together and they both look around for the kid, expecting him to pop out from behind a tree. Instead the sheet cracks and dissolves back into the air around it.

“Huh,” Todoroki says.

“Fucking weird,” Bakugou agrees. He starts walking forward but halts. “You burning anything, cyclops?”

Todoroki sniffs the air. Wood smoke. Strange. “I don’t use that part of my Quirk in dense vegetation like this. Forest fires are extremely dangerous, Bakugou.”

“I’m extremely dangerous.”

“Does one of 1-B have a fire Quirk?” He turns in a slow circle. Through a gap in the canopy, black smoke billows across the night sky.

They both snap their heads around at the sound of someone stumbling through the trees. Brown-hair staggers out of the darkness.

“There’s a guy—” he pants, “poison—hold your breath.”

“What?” Bakugou curls his lip. “You tryna to scare us or something? This is worse than that speech-bubble fuck.”

“No—” they both jolt as brown-hair collapses onto the ground. His pupils are pinpricks and sweat beads on his forehead. “—villains.”

He passes out. There is a millisecond where both stare at his unconscious form. Then they move.

“We had about a five minute walk back to the entrance. If we sprint, we can make it there in a minute and a half.” Todoroki grabs brown-hair in a fireman’s carry. “I don’t need my hands to use my Quirk; I’ll carry him.”

It takes more concentration to not gesture, but he can. If he needs to double task, he can conduct his Quirk by kicking.

Bakugou brings his palms up in front of him and Todoroki can see sweat seeping out of his pores. “Weird-ears and invisible-girl shouldn’t be to Ragdoll yet. She can take care of that area.”

The smell of fire is getting stronger and through the trees, Todoroki can see a purple haze rising with the thick smoke. Bakugou strips out of his shirt and ties it over the bottom of his face in a temporary gas mask. The hand Todoroki is not using to hold onto brown-hair’s knee and forearm covers his nose. One more layer of protection will not hurt.

“Everyone!” A voice rings through their heads. “We’re under attack by two villains! There might be more out there! All those who can should get to camp at once! If you encounter an enemy don’t engage! Just retreat!”

“Shit!” Bakugou curses. “How many of these guys are there!”

Todoroki looks over his shoulder to see if they have any pursuers. Bakugou’s arm slams into his chest and pushes him to a standstill.

“Who’s that up ahead?”

He can hear a voice now. It is slurred and soft, like someone comforting themselves. “...pretty flesh.”

Todoroki turns his head to see a figure wrapped in black with his arms bound behind his back. The man gets up from his kneel on the ground and Todoroki notices it.

A large smear of blood painting the ground. In the center, a hand. A wide, calloused palm and long fingers.

Satou is back at the camp, protected by Aizawa and Vlad King. If he has his timing right, Kouda should not have entered the forest yet. But Tokoyami and Shouji? Those two are in front of him.

The escaped death row inmate Moonfish steps over Shouji's severed hand and spins to face them.

Todoroki's train of thought crashes into horrific chaos.

(They were supposed to be *safe*. This wasn't supposed to happen again. They should have been *fine*.)

"Bakugou," he says and his voice is empty. It has been seared of emotion, just vibrations of particles under the inescapable darkness of the trees. His face is blank and flat and he burns on the inside; he shelters a bonfire between his ribs and it is threaten to boil him alive. "Take this."

He drops the kid in Bakugou's arms and ignores his sputtering. His outsides are ice and his insides twist in anger, in fear, in absolute fury.

Moonfish's mouth opens and teeth spill out. They erupt from his gums and tear through the air like white knives. His head tilts back and crazed laughter crawls its way out from behind jagged mess of

enamel.

And Todoroki, Todoroki cracks down the middle. Fire and ice. A perfect divide. Clinical apathy bleeds into his terror and rage burns away his calm and he is just a husk spilling over with emotion he cannot contain.

He thinks, “They’re dead.”

And, “It’s my fault.”

And, “I failed.”

And, “I’ll kill him.”

He grabs one of the knives from his shoulder sheath and races forwards, ice already breaking from the ground to shield him from Moonfish’s teeth. He dodges between the pillars, and lets his left arm ignite. Tokoyami’s sweatshirt sleeve disintegrates into ash.

There is a loud crack as the teeth pull out from his ice. Moonfish chatters and drools as his teeth split into different directions, weaving through the walls Todoroki raises and honing in on him. He returns a stream of fire. Moonfish shrieks in the distance and Todoroki has to roll to the side as teeth surge out of the other side of his flames.

They embed in the ground around him as he twists out of the way, already following his fire with spears of ice. As he steps out of his roll, he sweeps his right leg to the side. A thick plane of black ice shoots forward in front of him, growing wider as it nears Moonfish. He follows it, sliding across the slick surface with ease. The closer he gets,

the more he has to pay attention to his surroundings. Impossibly sharp teeth stab at him from all directions and split when they miss him to dig into ice. It is like trying to escape a net of razors. Crystal-like chips of ice spray into his face with the force of their impact. Droplets of water catch in his eyelashes and evaporate under the fire billowing from his left side.

He hears a voice, Mandalay's, in his head. It is barely audible over the howl of adrenaline and the chant that he was unable to protect to people he cares about. Eraserhead has authorized them to fight back.

Todoroki would not stop even if the man had prohibited this. His friends are *dead*. He *failed*. He was supposed to fix this problem. He planned the operation to start in two months. It is *too late*.

Moonfish slips on the ice and writhes on the ground. The teeth let up for a second as they retract back towards him. Then, the villain sinks his teeth into the nearby trees and pulls himself up. "Flesh, flesh, flesh," he chants as his teeth begin another chaotic attack.

"Kacchan! Avoid battle Kaccan!" Mandalay's voice shouts.

Behind him, a blast. "Don't rush in you fucking moron! You suicidal or just stupid?" Bakugou screams.

And Todoroki does not listen, does not care. A pillar of ice grows underneath his sliding feet and catapults him into the air. His right hand whips out and across his body, fingers curled like claws. Jagged spines of ice decked in hoarfrost shear through Moonfish's teeth and send him crashing down. The man manages to catch himself on his broken teeth just as Todoroki reaches the apex of his leap.

He pulls his left hand back and the flames licking over his arm pool in

front of his fist. Distantly, he can smell burning plastic as the knife handle starts to melt. A fireball swells, tendrils of cherry red swirling off the white core. He punches forward and it soars towards Moonfish.

The man flips over the missile and screams. Even though he escapes the blaze, the fireball is hot enough, close enough, to sear him. It is barely a second-degree burn, but Todoroki was not aiming for Moonfish in the first place.

There is a hiss as the flames hit the pillars of ice Moonfish had stuck his teeth into. Then, a bang as gaseous water expands in the heat. Shards of ice fly through the air and Moonfish is sent tumbling again. He lashes out with his teeth, searching desperately for either Todoroki's body or something he can stabilize himself with.

He finds the latter in the tree line. Moonfish dangles like a demented spider with its legs pinned to tens of branches.

Unfortunately for him, those branches are soon enveloped in the inferno Todoroki created. He screams again and tries to push away from the rolling flames.

Todoroki sweeps a sheet of ice underneath himself at an angle. He lands on top of it and ducks low as Moonfish orients himself with the sound of sneakers squeaking on the slick slope. The man shoots a flurry of teeth in his direction. Todoroki unleashes another barbed wave of ice. It spreads towards Moonfish in rough peaks and climbs up his shins, pinning him in his precarious position by the growing fire.

He hears the whistle of a projectile through the air and rears back to avoid it. Moonfish spread his volley of teeth wide. The majority was caught by Todoroki's ice, but this one broke through.

It changes direction in the air, slicing down and through the muscles of his right forearm. Blood sprays in the air.

“Flesh, flesh! Give me your flesh!” Moonfish screeches.

“Todoroki!” Bakugou yells. The infrequent explosions that he had been aiming at Moonfish’s sides stop, before a deafening boom rings out. The force of the explosion shoves Moonfish upper body further into the spreading fire.

The man’s screaming is grating, unnecessarily shrill over the crackle of flames. Todoroki splinters the man’s tooth with a small iceberg. He tries to catalogue the damage to his forearm. Moonfish, at the very least, cut through his brachioradialis. Maybe some of his extensors. Endorphins have numbed his pain, but he cannot curl his arm up. He lets a patch of frost grow over it. The lack of sensation should be concerning, but Todoroki cannot bring himself to care. This man is going to suffer for what he did.

He examines the knife in his left hand. The plastic handle has melted to his skin and the blade is glowing red. It is almost useless in this state. Almost.

Todoroki flips the knife and catches it in his palm. As soon as Bakugou’s second, fury-induced explosion lets up, he throws the knife as hard as he can in Moonfish’s direction. It stabs deep into the man’s thigh. He wails.

There is a crashing sound in the distance. Someone is tearing down trees. It must be another villain, he thinks as he races forward again. He needs to end this soon.

Moonfish is in a thrashing panic in the raging inferno. He whips his teeth around in uncontrolled terror. The man can't seem to decide between chipping himself out of his icy prison, or attacking noises randomly. Todoroki rides a column of ice up and above the struggling man. Moonfish's teeth embed in the wall as Todoroki springs from his perch.

Bakugou's palms crackle below him. He unleashes a flurry of blasts, punctuating the roar of explosions with growls. Moonfish whips his face around, ignoring the way his teeth shatter under Bakugou's onslaught. The man finally makes up his mind and sends all thirty-two of his teeth towards the sound.

Bakugou throws the 1-B kid out of the way of the attack and holds up a smoking palm. His legs shake as he braces himself for the pain and meets Moonfish with a bellow.

And Todoroki lands on top of Moonfish's head. The force of his touchdown breaks Moonfish through the ice trapping him. They both careen towards the ground.

Moonfish crashes against the forest floor. Todoroki's feet hit the ice flecked earth and does not waste a second in grabbing the man by the back of the head. His fingers dig into the harness keeping Moonfish's mouth open. He pulls the villain up, tightens his grip, and smashes Moonfish's head into the closest tree.

Ash falls around him from the burning canopy. The ground shakes as trees plummet to the ground nearby. Todoroki lifts Moonfish's head up and slams it down again. And again. And again until his gums are empty and his jaw is hanging open at an unnatural angle.

He drops the man on the ground and watches as blood trickles over his lips and sinks into the earth. And he feels—

Todoroki feels nothing. He has been hollowed out, his emotions stripped from him. For a few minutes, his only goal was to tear the villain apart. And he did. But now, as he stands over the unconscious body of the man who murdered his friends, he is empty. No fury curdles in his chest. The fire from before has died, even as the flames around him still spread through the trees.

They were supposed to be *fine*. They were supposed to be *safe*.

He runs a hand through his hair and does not care when he leaves a smear of red through the white. He does not *care*. For a second, he felt his ambition finally realized, the motivation he was missing surge through him like never before. He understood.

But now, nothing. He cannot—

“There! I see fire.” A voice rings out. The crashing from before is much closer now. Todoroki turns back to Bakugou and sees—

“Bakugou! Todoroki! One of you, please give us some light!” It is Shouji, wide-eyed and carrying Midoriya on his back. He careens out of the forest and behind him—

The earth shakes as Dark Shadow slams a hand down. It is gigantic, bigger than Todoroki has ever seen it. Opaque fumes of darkness stream from its shifting form and its eyes glow under the thick smoke of multiple fires. Dark Shadow opens its mouth and Todoroki catches a glimpse of Tokoyami, fighting desperately against black tendrils trying to drag him into the abyss.

“Give us some light! Tokoyami’s on a rampage!” One of Shouji’s

mouths yells.

And the embers cradled in Todoroki's ribcage catch. And they blaze. It is not the wrath of before, not the desire to destroy everything in his path, not the unbearable sorrow boiling over and becoming perilous calm. It is brighter than that. The inescapable, overwhelming emotions have burned off. It is raw now, pure and swollen in his chest. He has found his goal.

He never wanted to become a hero. He still doesn't. But looking at his friends, bleeding and scared but *here*, something blooms inside of him that he hasn't felt in a very long time.

It's inspiration, alive and optimistic and so fulfilling it rips at his heart. Before, he had a loose sense of what he wanted. He planned for years, tore down villain organizations from the shadows, but it was all distant. Like a routine he was following without knowing why. It was the right thing and something he could accomplish, so he did it.

Fire licks across his arm and flares to life across his left side. And it feels right, like it belongs there. The flames shine in the darkness, brighter than the sun, brighter than anything he has ever made. It is effortless and dazzling and his.

He sprints towards Dark Shadow and he smiling behind his mask. It's not a wide grin, just a slight lifting of his lips no one will see, but it feels bigger than all his previous emotions. Because he is smiling at himself. Because the previous tangents of thought he barely glanced at, hundreds of times spent hoping that his friends, the people he cares about, will be safe, flood back to him. He has a purpose.

He doesn't want to be a hero. He doesn't think he could be. That term is saved for leaders with hair like the sun and women tearing mountains down and a man who refused to leave his side no matter

how much he did not deserve it. But he will wake up everyday to make this world a better place. It sounds childish, but his friends are alive and he is riding high on endorphins and he is so relieved.

Tokoyami collapses to the ground and gasps for air. He is sweating, visibly shaken.

Shouji crouches in front of him and Todoroki stumbles over too. "Are you okay?" Shouji asks.

Tokoyami glares at the floor. His small hands claw in the earth. "Shouji," he says in a small voice, "I'm sorry. You too Midoriya. I was out of control."

He looks up when Shouji puts a hand on his shoulder. "Save that for later. That's what you would tell me. Let's get through this first."

"Speaking of out of control," Bakugou mutters in the back. Todoroki steps on his foot.

He would go up to Tokoyami too, would grab one of Shouji's arms and reassure himself that they are fine, but blue fire is spreading in the distance. They will have time later, he reassures himself. They are going to get out of this.

"One of the villain's targets is Kacchan," Midoriya says from Shouji's back. Bakugou opens his mouth to yell and Todoroki steps on him again.

"We need to return to camp." Shouji shifts Midoriya up. They all stare as a gap in Shouji's arms reveals a limp, bruised hand.

“The Pussycats were fighting in the clearing when I was there so we should just go right through the forest. It will be faster and we will be less likely to encounter a villain.” Midoriya hooks his chin over Shouji’s shoulder. “But they could be anywhere.”

Midoriya details a plan to for their safe return. He and Shouji will take the lead, while Todoroki and Bakugou follow close behind. Shouji’s sensory abilities will detect incoming threats, Todoroki will provide defense, and Tokoyami will guard their backs.

Bakugou’s face curls. He protests the concept of ‘protection’. Todoroki tries to step on his foot again, but gets shoved. The 1-B kid, who Midoriya identifies as Tsuburaba Kosei, is deposited back in his arms.

They line up and walk into the woods.

Chapter End Notes

IMPORTANT: I am going to be changing my ao3 username. I have had this account since I was about 14 years old. My current username (as of 7/8/2018) 1. is not that interesting to me anymore, 2. has aged badly, and 3. is something I've been meaning to change for a while. According to what I've read, none of my stories should be deleted. None of my message should be messed up, and your bookmarks should not be effected. Links to my profile that use my old name WILL be broken. You guys probably won't see the change for a week (I think?), but this is a great step forward! I am excited! New username is ewfte: a combination of the Old English word efte and Middle English word ewte. Both mean newt, one of my favorite animals.

I love Hagakure so much and headcannon buff, delinquent, bad ass so hard canon confuses me. I saw a gif of Hagakure trying to do pull ups in the gym but her arms were shaking so hard. My brain immediately came to the conclusion she must have done over 100 pull ups. That was totally the explanation.

The time Todoroki had to help Hagakure out (mentioned during

part two) was when she was brought in for questioning. Someone was stealing stuff and the police wanted to know if she had any information about it.

Todoroki: "I would never use my fire in a dense forest like this"

Todoroki, a whole minute later: "never mind, fuck that.
everything here is about to burn"

Look forward to more angry Todokashi, villains, some more character growth, messing around with the plot, and the rewards of my one minute foray into the symptoms and treatments for concussions.

Update

Ok, so it's been three years. I honestly intended to finish this—I have a whole outline and unpublished writing I'm going to post below—but it's been an eventful three years. If you want to read where the Victory series was going to go, you can skip ahead. A lot of it is messy, unfinished work and notes but I do have some completed chapters. Spoilers though, but that doesn't really matter anymore I guess? I'm not planning on updating past this.

Thank y'all for sticking with me through this whole angsty mess of a fic. I genuinely enjoyed writing it while I did, but I think it's time for some closure. I don't want anyone to hold out hope or anything. But I really appreciate all of you. Maybe you'll stick around for my next 100k+ fic about some emotionally repressed, sleep deprived loser with severe depression and PTSD. I'm no longer going to write BNHA fic though, so probably not. Love you either way.

I started this fic as a mentally ill teenager. Now, as a mentally ill adult, I wanted to close this instead of letting it hang over my head forever. I'm planning on going back and deleting a lot of the author notes, as I feel like I got way too personal in some of them. I know there are typos and inconsistencies, and a genuine thanks to everyone who pointed that out. I could only proofread my own shit so many times. I'm just going to leave those as is. I am very tired lmao.

If anyone wants to adopt this, make spinoffs, or fic of this fic: full fucking send. I would love to see people do that, even if I won't interact with the BNHA fandom anymore. This is cheesy as hell, but when I eventually publish my graphic novel, I would love to have people write about it. Seeing y'all like my fic to the extent that people have written related works is incredible. Again, I really appreciate it.

So, reasons. I'm going to be brief cause y'all don't need to hear three years-worth of *stuff* and *things*. I would say hmu if you have questions, but I honestly have too much anxiety to check my inbox and I don't feel comfortable giving away more info than I need to.

Alright, here is a concise bullet point list, because what better way is there to organize your thoughts?

- School: I got into college! It's hard! Sometimes it sucks! But you gotta do what you gotta do to get that 60k a year salary to buy your friends all the plants they want.

- Special interest change: autism brain has moved onto One Piece. It's great and I will not shut about it irl. Unfortunately, I have no more room in my head for any other thoughts.
- Bad experiences: aight so BNHA fandom is pretty damn toxic and I had a very rough time with messages I got on the tumblr for this fic and my (private) account. I know these people do not represent the entire fandom, but they soured it for me. It is what it is.
- Bad messages: Goddamn!!!! Do not fucking tell someone you will commit if they don't update wtf is wrong with you?!! That shit was worth than the death threats. Go touch some grass godbless <3
- Mental illness: speaks for itself, I've been going thru it

To all my commenters who I've had wonderful conversations with, left me paragraphs of messages, indulged my questions, and let me know what they liked: Thank you!!!!!!! I cannot feasibly write enough exclamation points to convey how much I appreciate you. You're the best and I hope you are doing well.

Anyway, that about wraps it up. Sorry to get your hopes up about a real update, but maybe someone will continue this for me. This fic was—and still is—very important to me and I would love to share that feeling. So write!! About anything and everything! Put words on paper and cringe at them years later, but keep going! Post and read other people's works and be proud of yourself. Even something as basic as opening a new doc is a victory. That's a step forward, and the first step is always the hardest. So be kind to yourself. Don't make yourself sick with guilt about not doing enough. Celebrate what you *can* do. I sound old as fuck just saying it, but if I learned anything over the past few years about writing and trying to enjoy your interests while you're in pain, I want to relay it. My beta reader is gonna bully me for being emotional, but she doesn't get out of jail for another year, so I'll worry about that then.

Stay safe y'all. It's 11pm here and I'm almost finished with my tea. Take care of yourself. Goodnight <3

Todoroki pulls his second knife out of his shoulder sheath and uses it to rip a five-inch strip off the bottom of his shirt. It is difficult with Tsuburaba draped over his back, but he manages. He clenches the knife and the end of the makeshift bandage between his teeth as he starts to wind it around his arm. The slash Moonfish gave him is not very wide, but it is deep. He ties the cloth off tightly and tries to breathe evenly as pain starts crawling back into his nerves.

He would cauterize the wound, but that would lead to a host of future problem. Increased risk of infection is one, but extensive tissue damage is what he is most worried about.

Bakugou trips over another root behind him and curses. They are much too loud. Todoroki knows his own steps are whisper-quiet, years of experience coming back to him. But the others crash through the undergrowth with little coordination.

Ahead of him, Shouji holds the three arms not wrapped around Midoriya in the air, ears and eyes swiveling. Todoroki stares at the blood seeping from the wound on one of his buds before looking away. They are going to be okay, he reminds himself.

The forest crackles around them. There is a low, rushing ambience of wildfires raging over the sound of trees falling. When Todoroki glances up, smoke rises in plumes and obscures the night sky. The rest of the class is safe, he tells himself. Ragdoll can protect them. There is no reason to think the last sound he would hear from Hagakure is a scream.

He flexes his left hand. The plastic from his knife handle, the one still lodged in Moonfish's thigh, is a warped mess on his palm. His skin has started to blister around the wax-like surface. He can really not go one battle without damaging himself.

Todoroki looks at where Midoriya is trying not to whimper every time Shouji takes a step. He is almost tied with the kid at this point for debilitating injuries. Aizawa will be furious.

The tree line ahead opens and they see two figures grappling on the ground. "Uraraka!" Midoriya calls out.

"Shouji! Guys!" Tsuyu shouts from where she is pinned to a tree.

The girl trapped under Uraraka twists out of her grasp and sprints off the path. Todoroki and Shouji run forward. Uraraka pulls herself up and pants.

“A villain,” she says and Midoriya pales, “she was nuts.”

“You’re hurt!”

“I’m fine.” She waves her hand and turns to check on Tsuyu. “I can walk.”

“You should come with us.” Midoriya offers. “We are taking Kacchan back to camp.”

“Bakugou?” Tsuyu asks.

Todoroki shifts Tsuburaba higher up his shoulders and waits for Bakugou to say something. No angry interjection comes.

He freezes. They have to be right behind him. There is no way he missed someone attacking them. He is just being paranoid. Bakugou is going to yell at Midoriya any second now. Tokoyami is going to sigh in exasperation.

But he does not want to turn around and check in fear of what he might—or might not—see.

“If you’re with Bakugou, where is he?” Tsuyu asks.

And Todoroki—

Todoroki really cannot take this anymore.

Adrenaline surges back into his system, pushing the exhaustion of not sleeping and losing a good amount of blood away. Black spots he did not notice creeping into his vision fade. He twists around, panic raking claws over his chest, and sees—

Nothing.

And a man laughs from a nearby tree. He poses, leaning against his cane sardonically. “Looking for someone?” He asks.

Two pale marbles are tossed in the air and caught by a gloved hand. Every movement is dripping in smugness, from the way he crosses his feet to how the feather on his hat sways in the breeze. He holds the marbles up in front of his masked face, as if to examine them. “I’ve taken him. He’s not a resource that belongs on the heroes’ side. We are going to put him on a stage where he will really shine.”

“Give him back!” Midoriya screams.

Tokoyami is missing too, Todoroki realizes with horror. Why is Tokoyami missing?

“Bakugou doesn’t belong to anyone,” the man says. The two marbles flip in his hand again, glinting in the glow of distant fire.

Two marbles. He has Tokoyami.

“Here,” Todoroki drops Tsuburaba beside Uraraka. He is already moving. Ice erupts from his first step, sharp peaks that streak through the air and slam into the tree the man is standing on.

He follows them. The ice contours to his footfalls, creating a staircase that he races on. He pulls back his right arm and whips it forward. His second knife flies.

The man rears back, just barely twisting away from the blade. It still impacts against the side of his white mask. Flakes of ceramic fall through the air and the villain clutches the side of his face. He tumbles off his perch and lands on another branch nearby.

“Ah, that is what I get for mocking you, I suppose. Is it because I took your friend?” He lets his hand fall from his head and reveals a long crack through his disguise. Blood runs down the rim of the mask and a grey eye stares down at them.

He leaps away from another spear of Todoroki’s grasping ice. “We only needed to collect Bakugou, but Shigaraki gave us some room to maneuver. With the right background and skill set, anyone can be useful to our plans. There are three people in this class who fit our needs quite well, not including dear Bakugou. And Tokoyami, well, if he can rampage against his friends so easily, what’s to say he cannot use that demon for our desires?”

Todoroki is going to kill him.

He reaches inside his ribs, digs for those bright flames beating next to his heart, and pulls power from his veins. Trees plummet to the ground in front of him as more ice than he has ever created at one time pours from his right side. Cold wind streams from his body, flowing from him in clouds of white steam.

The sound is deafening. In front of him, needles of ice creak as they grow larger, until they surpass the ancient oaks. They form an almost two-hundred foot path of destruction through the forest. A bristling mass that reflects the dull orange of the forest fires and glows.

Patches of frost creep across his face. Crystals form between his eyelashes and he clenches his teeth to keep them from chattering. The man flips over the jagged mess of ice, chuckling as he easily evades the shifting mass. Todoroki burns cold as he pushes more power into his creation. If only one of the man's limbs were caught, they could win this.

“Vanguard Action Squad! The target has successfully been captured!”

The man jumps from needle to needle erratically. Todoroki swears. He is forced to pull back and try to flush heat through his body. The villain is too light on his feet for him to fight long distance. He needs to get closer.

“Be at the evacuation point within five minutes of this transmission!” The man's voice rings over the forest as he backflips off a spear of ice and onto a tree. His coat flaps in the wind before he disappears from sight.

Todoroki starts to follow. Flames peel off his arm and arc through the air, racing towards the retreating shape of the villain. He has ice swelling under his feet, ready to shoot him across the forest. Water vapor is rising off him. He still has two knives left, both strapped to the sides of his ankles. The bandage on his arm has started to darken. He released his control on the patch of frost sealing the cut when he started fighting again.

Under five minutes. He can do this.

“Todoroki!” Shouji yells from the ground.

He glances down. His classmates are sprinting forwards. Shouji is panicked, wild-eyed and normally tame shock of hair sticking up. On his back, Midoriya's broken arms are an ugly purple. Uraraka and Tsuyu follow. They do not seem to notice as a patch of thorns scratches at their legs.

Two paths diverge out in front of him. “Save him,” screams the voice in his head. “Your fault,” cries another. He cannot let Tokoyami be taken. He needs to save him. He needs to shove his fist through the villain's heart and watch him fall to his knees. He needs to tear down the League for even thinking of kidnapping his friend.

A quieter tone, almost indistinguishable under the chant pounding against his skull. Aizawa stares at him from across a café, disappointment etched into his face. A fork flashes in the multicolored

light from the stained glass window. Two dark eyes look at him under long, black hair. “Your actions, while commendable, come across as arrogant, uncontrollable, and suicidal.”

Those who abandon their friends are worse than scum. But this goes two ways. If he takes off without Shouji and Midoriya and Tsuyu and Uraraka, he is leaving them to an uncertain fate. They will try to follow and he cannot protect them if he has gone ahead. There are unknown forces moving through these woods and while he will be fine, they might not.

Acting as part of a team will slow him down by seconds, but even as it grates against him, he will not be deserting Tokoyami. Midoriya is smart. He has better tactical skill than most adults. Uraraka, Tsuyu, and Shouji are strong. Together, they have a better chance than just him alone.

Two paths diverge out in front of him. Todoroki chooses.

(He hopes, somewhere buried under fear and anger and resolve, that Aizawa will be proud of him for this. That the people he left in another world would be proud. That they will see his improvement.)

The ice under his feet stills. It instead shapes into a slope that he drops down until he is eye-level with his classmates. He listens as Midoriya details his plan.

It is a good one, if lacking any back up ideas or an end besides ‘get them back’. Uraraka strips off her button up and Todoroki helps her bind Midoriya’s arms. He would prefer Midoriya stay back. Forcing him to would be hypocritical though. And Todoroki knows that Midoriya would try to follow anyway.

He wishes the kid would learn how to trust people more. Again, hypocritical, but Midoriya has to realize one day that he cannot to anything. That’s how All Might got hurt: by rushing into a fight without backup and staying afterwards to clear injured civilians out. Todoroki has watched the footage. He has seen the blood seeping through the man’s shirt.

All Might may be the strongest hero, but there are others too, competent ones that can and have risked their lives. Trying to do the work of ten men is not only insulting to their talents, but also suicidal. The entire concept that heroes rush into situations they cannot possibly win just because someone needs help is a toxic one.

(Todoroki likes statistics. They group tragedies into tight little boxes of numbers. When he was a dictator, he made very difficult decisions. It was easier to sleep at night when loss ratios did not have faces.

Todoroki likes statistics. He keeps excel sheets and watches news feeds and tracks the lives of pro-heroes with clinical ease. All Might has saved tens of thousands of people.

But hundreds more follow his blinding shadow into an early grave. Todoroki watched All Might's shriveled form from a hospital bed. He hoped Midoriya's future would not look like this.)

The sensation of losing gravity is disorienting, but then they are flying through the air. Shouji's additional eyes stream tears from the wind battering them. His bruising grip around Todoroki's wrist is comforting as they start to fall, right onto the waiting back of the masked villain.

Physics reassert themselves and they crash forward into a clearing. Todoroki grabs the man's coat and they slam into the ground. Midoriya lands with two feet on the villain's back and the man's breath leaves him in a strained wheeze. The force of Midoriya's impact travels up the kid's legs and sends him tumbling off onto the dirt.

Todoroki starts to cover the villain with ice when a deep voice speaks up.

"Dodge."

He looks up to see a man with heavy burn scars and black hair pull a hand back.

And blue fire erupts through the glade.

The masked villain spins out of Todoroki's grip and runs forward, flipping over burned man's flames and landing by his side. Todoroki grabs Midoriya by the shoulder and throws him to the side, away from the blast. He hopes that Shouji can dodge as he races towards, orange flames already surging from his left hand.

His fireball tears through the blue. Vapor wisps from the holes of Tokoyami's ruined jacket as Todoroki cools his skin to offset the heat of the man's fire.

He recognizes him from grainy videos Dronehead posted. Dabi.

Unknown name, unknown age. A fire Quirk and a previous affiliation with the Reformers before the Hero Killer incident. Todoroki has not received any reports on him after the gang was broken apart by a rival organization.

Dabi smiles with sharp teeth as Todoroki sprints forward. He pushes a hand forward. Todoroki feels the temperature spike suddenly. Dabi's hand whips back with the force of the blast and Todoroki slides under the flames, left foot swiping out and smacking against the back of Dabi's leg.

The man lands on his knee with a curse. Blue fire wraps wildly around the clearing. Ash falls from the canopy as leaves burn. Out of the corner of his eye, Todoroki sees Shouji throw a man off his back.

Todoroki plants his left foot on the ground and pivots away from it. He spins, right leg lashing up and down, heel slamming against the back of Dabi's head. The man falls onto his palms. Todoroki pushes off and throws himself at the masked villain.

Red fire flares out and the masked villain vanishes with a pop. Todoroki flies over where the man used to be and hits the ground. He rolls before swiveling to get his legs underneath him, fingers digging into the earth. Detritus from the forest clings to his hair, leaves and twigs scratching him from where they latched onto his clothes.

The masked man reappears to a snap of displaced air. He brushes his coat sleeves off and reaches into his pocket before pausing.

"You got Bakugou?" Dabi asks.

"He doesn't!" Shouji yells from across the clearing. He slams an elbow into a villain's stomach and holds a hand up. Todoroki's jaw unclenches as he sees two, pale marbles sitting between Shouji's thumb and forefinger.

And then, many things happen at once.

Midoriya screams in pain as the blonde girl stabs him in the shoulder. Shouji starts sprinting towards her when suddenly the marbles in his hand explode into chunks of ice. A beam of blue light erupts from behind a bush and knocks the blonde villain off Midoriya. Todoroki sees Aoyama's pale hair shining under the moonlight. And portals of ethereal smoke rip open in the clearing.

"It's a bad habit of mine," the masked villain says as he helps Dabi up.

A Noumu lumbers out of the forest behind Todoroki but he can only stare as the man removes his mask. “One of the tenets of magic states that flaunting a particular object is,” the man’s mouth opens, revealing two marbles resting on his tongue, “inevitably part of the trick.”

Todoroki’s hand darts down to his ankle, tearing a knife from its sheath. He’s already sprinting forward. Heat blooms before blue flames whip out, surging towards him with a rush of air.

His arms come up to shield his face and Todoroki breaks through the wall of fire. His skin burns but he does not stop, does not slow, flames of his own wrapping up his arm and turning the blade cherry red. His vision is white from the light of the fire and dark impressions of where the masked villain and Dabi should be dance in front of his eyes. The knife slashes up, invisible to Todoroki under the searing flames and thick smoke, and towards the masked man’s mouth.

He bursts through the cloud of ash to Dabi’s scarred visage. The man grabs him by the neck and flings him across the clearing, but not before Todoroki feels his knife shear into the masked villain’s face. He watches the marbles fall out of the corner of his eye as the ground races to meet his thrown form. Todoroki’s head bounces against a rock with a *crack* and he tumbles across the ground until his back slams into the roots of a burning tree. His skull rings with the impact.

Todoroki opens his eye to see the masked villain clutch his mouth. Blood seeps from between his fingers to stain his white gloves. Swearing breaks through the screaming claxons battering against his brain. Dabi lunges forward, burnt hands reaching for two specks of light. They drop to the ash-stained forest floor, glowing with light from nearby fires like dying stars. Darkness starts to envelop the masked villain’s yellow coat as he sways backwards. Todoroki’s vision is swimming.

When Todoroki presses his palms to the ground to lever himself up, the world tilts. He manages to stumble up but his run is slow, like he is moving through water. Dabi’s fingers wrap around one of the balls of light. The other ricochets off the ground and rolls through a scruffy patch of grass. Todoroki throws himself on top of it. His shirt has ridden up when he was tossed by Dabi. Stones and grit scour his stomach as he slides towards the marble.

He misjudges the distance as he tries to grab it, fingers barking against

the raised root of a nearby tree. His eye tracks the streams of movement of everything around him. An arm reaches towards him, trailing the black and blue vapor of its fading afterimages. He manages to catch the marble in a hand before he is pulled up by Tokoyami's jacket hood.

Todoroki gags from the pressure to his neck and slams an elbow backwards into Dabi's gut. The man wheezes but does not let go. Instead, he shakes Todoroki violently. His already wobbling vision decends into frantic blurs of light. Todoroki brings his elbow up, but is caught.

Dabi pulls Todoroki's arm behind his back with a hand wreathed in flame, forcing him to drop his knife. Todoroki twists, instinct taking over and moving his muscles into the patterns his past life, his father, his personal training carved into his bones. His head snaps back to smash against Dabi's nose. The villain swears and yells something inaudible over the pounding in Todoroki's skull. The headache building behind his eyes fractures to wrap around his bruised, tapioca-pudding brain. Every shift compresses his parietal bones tighter and the light burns his eye.

Another pop of displaced air. Tokoyami's terrified eyes shine under the flickering fire around them. The hand previously encircling the marble is clamped over his bony shoulder. Through the shifting trails of light and sound, Todoroki can see his friend reach towards him, pale hand grasping at the burn-mottles sleeves of his jacket.

"We have him," slurs the masked villain with a mouth full of blood.

Todoroki sees violet smog creeping at the sides of his vision. A distant shout echoes from one of the closing portals. Bakugou, he realizes.

Scarred fingers fist into his hood and start to wrench him backwards. Todoroki is off balance, down an arm with a hand grasping Tokoyami's shoulder to hold him up, with a knife he cannot reach and flames he cannot use without hurting his friend and the heat twisting around Dabi is enough to sear the water vapor from the air, to make his throat rasp and his tongue feel dead in his cotton-filled mouth. His brain is full of thick haze, his basic instincts overriding control of his logical thought and dropping him into an adrenaline filled, incoherent panic. Shouji is sprinting towards them and the Noumu's empty face turns to stare at him and Midoriya trips on his hobbling race towards the rapidly shrinking hole Bakugou vanished into. Todoroki's head is a minefield of pain with no gaps between bombs, just an endless

expanse of explosives that boom against the breaking mass of his skull with each kick he aims behind himself. Tokoyami's fingers catch on his burnt, red skin and he is about to say something, about to scream something as blue flames swell and the temperature soars and Dabi grins at Shouji, open hand extending past Todoroki's head to meet the boy running with a—

Shouji's eyes widen and Tokoyami yells, "TODOROKI!" and flames pour out of a hand almost black with grafted tissue and Todoroki—

"I'm sorry," he thinks he says. He is not sure if his word can be heard over the rush of noise, if the shift of his mouth can be seen through his mask. Tokoyami's thin fingers claw at his blistering arms as Todoroki—

He shoves Tokoyami away and digs his heels into the ground and *heaves* the weight of Dabi's body backwards, not stopping when the arm pinned behind his back pops and the unyielding vice around his skull squeezes and the sharp needling ache of his blistering hands, charred arms, pulled shoulder pulse white with pain.

The last thing he sees before he topples through the smoking portal are the two people he thought dead an hour ago, who he ignited the gasoline clinging to his lungs for, who he scraped his veins raw for so he could fill them with brilliant napalm to light his heart on fire and burnburnburn with purpose that cracked his ribs into pieces and rebuilt them with pure sunlight, with hope and motivation and a will to fight he has not felt for sixteen years. And then the slash in the clearing snaps shut in front of his face. His features are smooth and calm and warm behind his mask. There is no sound as space reseals, but the finality it brings is deafening. Todoroki falls through the darkness and for a second, just as he blinks his grey eye, he thinks he sees the stars of another world sprayed across the empty void.

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Fuyumi gets the call as she is washing dishes in the tiny sink of her apartment. There is a textbook open on the scuffed dining room tables. She's avoiding it now. Its pages open to glossy diagrams, pictures pointing out exact behaviors and social goals. The spine of the book is cracked thoroughly and its geometric cover no longer has the slick surface of a recent purchase. Well-used is a generous term. A pink stain has soaked through the crumpled mess of the upper right hand corner. Faded yellow highlighter streaks the worn ink.

Most of her school supplies are second hand. The majority of her furniture too. Mismatched cups and dinged spoons are the staples of her apartment. Ikea dressers, thrift store mirrors spiderwebbing around the edges, a rice cooker she picked up from a garage sale. Fuyumi is not well-off by any means. She eats the staple student diet of rice, eggs, and value packs of fruit. Onigiri and thick blocks of sodium rich, pre-packaged ramen when she's too tired to make anything. She is ruthless on budgeting, scraping away at her grocery and laundry expenses however she can. College is expensive and rent is expensive and the prices she has been eyeing online for lawyers is frankly terrifying. Slowly and painfully, money is dredging up into a separate account she set up. Its purpose is not entirely concrete in her mind: schooling or gifts or freedom, she doesn't know. In her baking receipts, it is titled "TODOROKI SHOUTO" in blocky characters.

The past months have been turbulent in ways she is and is not used to. Previously, there has not been any real certainty on her continued health, on her sibling's continued happiness. Living in the sprawling Todoroki mansion was like paying homage to a mad and cruel god. And Endeavor certainly acted as one. Fuyumi spent twenty-two years in that house. The pit of horror wrapping like a black hole in her stomach has not yet faded. She is not sure if it will ever fade. For twenty-two years she was taught to keep her head down, never argue, never present her opinion, and clean up the messes other's made. She taught herself to rebel in the small ways: to turn on the television when her father was not home, to silently urge her siblings to leave, to make birthday cakes and sweep all the flour up afterwards. She taught herself how to make her youngest brother's life bearable.

Shouto was a constant point of contention. Back when her mother still lov—back when her mother still looke—back when her mother still lived with them, he was one of the only things she would try to fight for. Fuyumi remembers jealously, thick and terrible and boiling in her lungs. Mother would lock herself in her room, would not leave, would not break from the terrifying fugue until she heard the rush of flames from the training room. Fuyumi resented her in the way that children do, confused and betrayed. She could not understand why Mother did not pay the rest of them attention, why she doted on Shouto when he clearly did not care for her. Fuyumi watched him push past Mother, his thin arms mottled red with burns and white with old scars. She remembers scraping her knee raw on the playground and Mother simply handing her a bandaid. She could not understand then.

She can now. She took psychology in her third year of high school. She poured over books in a desperate need for self-understanding.

Somehow, the dark text on grainy paper made Endeavor more of a monster than her memories do. Something about having hard labels, a straight and undeniable diagnosis, made what he did register in her mind rationally. Before it was nauseatingly tangible, but now his identity branded itself into her head.

(There is one memory she has that she cannot understand. Perhaps it was before he realized she would never achieve anything to his specifics. A large hand wrapping firmly around her small one. He walked too fast and she had to run or risk getting tugged. His skin was warm and his eyes were chips of sapphire impossibly far away and when he smiled she burned with the need to make him acknowledge her. Fuyumi was an only child once. Her earliest memory is one of naivety. One where she did not see Mother's flinches, did not comprehend the fearful expression leveled upon her, upon her own rapidly growing stomach. One where she thought of the man who raised her as a father. One before she realized she was a prisoner in that sprawling mansion, trapped inside with a man who did not love her and a mother who concentrated so hard on surviving she broke inside.)

Fuyumi loves her younger brothers, loveslovesloves them more than anything. Her feelings towards her mother are complicated, but resolving through hospital visits and quiet acceptance

She wipes most of the water off on a hand towel and picks up her cellphone with soapsuds clinging to the back of her hands. It takes a second to swipe accept for the call, her damp fingers tracing spotty lines of water across the glass of her phone screen.

"Hello?" She wedges the phone between her shoulder and her ear to turn pick up the next mug. It is a mom skill, her friend told her. She thinks she learned it when she still lived in that house, circling around her brothers with the awkward hesitation constant fear brings. She was in charge of everything then, the laundry and meals and dishes and cleaning. In a corner of her mind she rarely listens to, the one that remembers all the kind things *He* did, before her youngest brother was born, she wonders what the house looks like now. Do the picture frames collect dust? Is the floor scattered with crumbs? Do bowls overflow the sink to collect on the counter?

"Is this Todoroki Fuyumi?" The caller's voice is rough, tinted with exhaustion and scratchy from emotion Fuyumi cannot name. Her brow furrows.

“Who is this?” Enough people managed to get the Todoroki home phone number that she is hesitant to respond immediately. Endeavor is a controversial man, who makes fans and enemies that never seem to have a state other than manic. She has gotten death threats before, frequent enough that she no longer tells her father. Would tell him, if she still lived in his sprawling home.

“This is Aizawa Shouta, the homeroom teacher for class 1-A.”

Fuyumi shuts the water off and takes the phone in her free hand, staring at the small window above the sink with worry rapidly etching lines into her forehead. She absently runs a thumb along the cracked handle of the mug. “Yes, we met.”

Aizawa starts to say something but the hoarseness in his throat catches and he stops to cough. Fuyumi listens as the volume is muffled, like he held his cell against the fabric of his shirt to save her from hearing the sound of him hacking. She presses her phone closer to her ear, not paying attention as the edge digs into her skin. In the very distance, she thinks she can hear the sound of sirens.

“Todoroki-san,” Aizawa finally continues. “One hour ago, the campsite classes 1-A and 1-B were staying at was attacked by villains. We—”

“What?” Fuyumi interrupts. Her fingers are bone white as they curl around the handle of the mug. “W-what happened?”

“The investigation is still on going,” Aizawa states and his voice is empty, is dull and somber and full of the kind of tension that comes from pushing yourself so hard that emotions slip off, that they stay locked up deep in your heart, buried so far down your head is full of static and every thought burns with apathy. Fuyumi knows this feeling *intimately*. “But as of right now, we believe the League of Villains was behind this attack. Pro-heroes are on the scene and three members of the syndicate are in our custody. However,”

He breaks off into another fit of coughing. Someone speaks in the background and there is a rustle. Aizawa is still coughing when another person speaks.

“Todoroki-san, this is Present Mic. We are calling to inform you—”

“Did something happen to Shouto? Is he okay?” Even at a horrified whisper her voice is harsh in the silence of the apartment. Fuyumi’s ear aches as she leans into her phone, but she does not relax her rigid posture. Her fingers are numb and her spine is a straight line and

every limb is tense, like she can somehow withstand the blow she can feel hovering in Present Mic's throat, just waiting to cross the miles of telephone wire and destroy her.

"Along with another student, Shouto was taken by the League of Villains."

The mug falls from her slack fingers to shatter on the metal base of the sink.

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Chapter 13- Shifts

The pocket of darkness he is falling through seems to exist outside of time itself. It is cold here. Actuality is subsumed the black velvet texture he imagines the spaces between galaxies feel like. He can see his own body, grey and blurring around the edges, but there are no light sources in the void. He thinks if there ever were, they have long since been swallowed by the impenetrable ink of this break in the perpetual lines of the present.

Dabi's grip on his wrist is insubstantial. It barely sets off the domino string of tripped sensory neurons that should be rioting in pain. The rest of his injuries match the thick fiber consistency of his brain. But distantly, his neck prickles. Something in this unclaimed breach is watching him.

Then, a sound of splitting reality. Todoroki slips through a second slash and sags immediately in Dabi's grip. Haze drips from the portal and unspools into the room, evaporating into a fine purple mist. The sudden flash of fluorescent light stings his eyes. He winces. Voices crescendo as he tries to redirect his concentration from the lines of pain burrowing into his body. His vision blurs and his legs threaten to give out and his perspective sways and dips under the onslaught of a horrible concussion.

He grits his teeth and goes limp, pulling Dabi off balance with the sudden weight of his crumpling form. The man swears and tries to pull him back to his feet. Todoroki's arm throbs white-hot in agony. With each yank, he can feel his misaligned joints scrape together. It hurtshurtshurts, but it is enough. His vision greys then sharpens as his exhausted body digs into the dredges of his adrenaline supply. He breathes in, out in a choppy staccato burst.

With this new clarity, Todoroki's eye darts around the room. His body is dead weight in Dabi's hold, but he takes a rapid analysis of who exactly he is dealing with. The majority of the League is here. A muscled woman brushes dirt off her pants as she talks to a guy with a reptilian Quirk. The girl who attacked Tsuyu and Uraraka is holding a vial to the grainy lights, babbling excitedly to another villain and ignoring Shigaraki's glare. The masked man is still cursing wetly. His gloves are soaked in red as he presses them to his mouth.

Todoroki's last knife is within his reach. He is certain the League will check him for weapons eventually. But now, as he is held up solely by Dabi's support, he knows how he looks: more injury than unbroken flesh, scarred tissue, arm twisted, dislocated, behind him. Blood mats his hair, drips down the nap of his neck and stains his navy mask dark. He looks ruined for this world, carved up in ways only a doctor can fix. He looks out of commission.

He does not look like a threat. He is a traumatized teenager on the verge of passing out. He is easy to pull, easy to lock away, almost comatose and on the verge of tears.

His burned fingers close around the hilt of his final blade. Todoroki tilts to the side and Dabi stumbles. The man's feet cross as he tries to regain his balance and the iron grip of his scarred hands loosens partly in surprise and partly in assumption that this dive towards the ground is Todoroki giving into gravity and exhaustion.

Todoroki can barely feel the handle of his knife past the melted plastic warping the skin of his palm. But, when he rips the blade from its sheath, the weight is as comforting as ever. No one notices his movements, no suspects anything. In the background, a small explosion pops as Bakugou fights Kurogiri's hold. The masked villain turns to the struggling kid, reaches out a hand with trails of red running from his ruined glove and under the cuff of his yellow coat. Shigaraki strides across the room and Dabi looks over his shoulder and the burnt sugar sting of nitroglyceride is thick in the air. Bakugou vanishes and—

And Todoroki counts.

One second: he surges off the ground, feet firmly planted under his previously slack form. The sudden shift in position has Dabi taking an involuntary step back, trying to steady himself. His fingers are barely a suggestion of a hold. Todoroki whips his left elbow back and it collides with Dabi's temple. He wrenches his numb wrist out of the

man's loose grasp. His knife is a line of flowing silver in the air as he follows Dabi's fall to the side. The blisters on his left arm ache as he whips his arm around, moving seamlessly from an elbow strike to wrapping around Dabi's neck.

Two seconds: Dabi's short cry has the rest of the League turning around. Their faces are slack with surprise and Todoroki slams a knee up and into Dabi's gut. The man chokes on a gasp and Todoroki lets him drop to the ground. Shigaraki's face twists into a snarl but the blonde villain springs forward first, whites of her eyes gleaming under the fluorescent sear of the bar's lights. She sprints towards him with murderous intent. Dabi curls into himself and groans.

Three seconds: Todoroki implements a strategy the League should have used on him. Double tap. He swings his right foot across his body. Dabi's jaw snaps shut with a crack as Todoroki's boot collides with his chin. Todoroki pulls his right knee to his chest, pivots his left heel inwards, and slams his heel through the blonde villain's weak guard in a textbook perfect sidekick. His shoe leaves a muddy imprint on the light fabric of her sweater. She is shoved backwards with force. "Toga!" a villain in a full bodysuit yells.

Four seconds: Lizard kid is up next, mass of blades whistling through the damp air of the bar as he moves. His form carries the barely noticeable mistakes of someone who learned more from online tutorials and spotty experience than from a real trainer. The fingers wrapping around his sword hilt are too close to the pommel; precision is abandoned for reach. Todoroki rocks forward onto the balls of his feet to watch the metal smear aftershadows through the patchy light. Lizard kid's arms bunch as he slashes downwards, aiming towards Todoroki's legs. The sword carves through the air and Lizard kid's eyes widen as Todoroki waits, waits, waits. He stares at Lizard kid with the confidence of a god. Iron sweeps inches from his calves, then underneath his scuffed shoes. Todoroki jumps over the blade. A loose knife scours the hardwood floor below him, but his timing is perfect. Even with black spots swimming in his vision, he is unbeatable. He took down Stain without using his Quirk. For this kid, he holds nothing back.

Five seconds: Todoroki is bone tired as he ghosts forwards, his feet numb and impossibly distant. The one, two, three, four thuds of his soles against the grimy floor are barely distinguishable under the painful ringing in his ears. He reaches for the familiar warmth of his Quirk, powers through over-exhaustion with grim ease. Ice spreads in sheets across the flooring. Spines erupt from the glassy surface in

intervals to stab through the air. There is a groan behind him as Dabi is buried underneath the rapidly growing planes. Todoroki's fist sinks into Lizard kid's stomach. Amateur mistake, using a midrange weapon so wildly. The villain chokes and Todoroki knocks his feet out from under him before turning, already raising his knife to block the—

Six seconds: Blonde villain is back in the action. He is down an arm, unable to grab her knife out of her hand while keeping it from stabbing him. Todoroki can only kick out at her knee. She hops out of the way and disengages his block before swinging back in. Her movements jerky and predictable. Another beginner. But what she lacks in technique, she makes up for in speed. Todoroki's blade whips across his body to block a slice to the side of his neck. There are motions behind him. "Don't kill—" Red flames swell down his arm to lash at her. She shrieks and falls into a roll to get away, sending a barstool crashing to the ground. Ice surges to her. Todoroki's skull is pounding, it feels like his brain is eating itself, as he forces his Quirk to cover her but—

Seven seconds: He is ripped from his feet, sent flying in the air towards the largest villain. Telekinesis, he thinks. Her right arm is stretched towards him. Fingers grab him around the neck and he reacts purely on instinct. His dislocated arm reaches for the hand grabbing him, his fingers curling around her wrist and pushing back, trying to slip through the weak point in her grip where her thumb is. There is a snap and he cannot tell if it is from his arm or her hand, but a noise is dragged out of his lungs anyway. A pained wheeze as his weak bones protest violently. But he is free. Todoroki celebrates by stabbing his knife into her bicep before grabbing her shoulder, pushing her arm down even as his right shoulder pops and burns. He uses the momentum to swing his left leg over her head, right following close behind as he spins through the air, knees locked around her head. The torque and weight of his body pull her down to the ground. They fall and his jaw clenches for what he expects will happen—

Eight seconds: The constant nails-on-chalkboard sound battering his brain cuts out as he slams into the floorboards. His head slams against the floor milliseconds after his dislocated shoulder does. Another choked off noise leaves his throat as he rolls, whole body shattering into pieces. Somehow, he is able to get to his feet. Somehow, he ducks the slash of a tape measure at his head. It is more of a drunken reel. Todoroki trips backwards, crashing into Shigaraki on his way. The man's hand is too close to his shoulder, is only growing closer, and Todoroki sets himself on fire. The scraps of Tokoyami's jacket crumble

into ash, but Shigaraki is forced to move. Todoroki tries to pull his ice around his body, to stab at the villains still on their feet, to fend off the second slice of the tape measure he is only barely able to dodge. Strands of white hair tinted red float into the air and Todoroki realizes

Nine seconds: He realizes what he already knew as soon as he threw himself and Dabi through that portal. He realizes what he already knew when he stared into Tokoyami's panicked eyes and mouthed "I'm sorry". He finally absorbs the gravity of this situation, the only predictable outcome of this fight.

Todoroki realizes that he is going to lose.

Nine seconds: His control over ice has snapped with the same sickening crack his shoulder did. The flames loosely curling around his right side gutter. His knife is still lodged in the muscled villain's arm. The nauseating pull of his stomach has him swaying and the shrill siren-screach of a concussion is back, is worse somehow and audible over the thrum of every cell in his body protesting its existence.

The masked villain reaches towards him with a blood-stained palm.

Nine seconds: Blue flames flare as Dabi emerges from his ice prison. The blonde villain stumbles to her feet and Lizard kid rises from where he was coughing violently. There are too many, but he cannot give up now, cannot fail when he is so close to his goal. Was so close to his goal. Shigaraki strides into reach and Todoroki lashes out, muscles in his legs bunching and eye narrowed as if he can blink the haze out and balance shot to shit. He gets one good hit in, puts enough force on it to make it count. His knuckles ram into the scarred skin of Shigaraki's neck and—

Ten seconds: A wet glove lands on the back of his head. There is a pop of displaced air. A sudden rush of noise, sound he cannot interpret as rushing in or out. A brief feeling of compression, like he is being pushed from all sides. A flash of light that blinds him. Or perhaps a sudden lack of light that does the same.

Then, feeling bleeds out of his bones. His thoughts clump around the edges of his consciousness, wobble precariously across thin stretches of his mind. There is a line of clarity he can grasp, but cannot hold. It is razor wire sharp and tears into his mental fingers, shreds his hands to scraps of useless flesh. He desperately grabs at it, unable to do anything else, unable to *think* to do anything else. It rips him apart. It

seeps with pain he remembers but cannot imagine until he is feeling it through the wire of reality. He holds on and rides the waves of charred arms, scarred hands, dislocated shoulder, ringing head, bruised skull until it burns him up. Until he can no longer take it. Until the necessity on why he needs to hold onto the wire evades him completely.

He lets go.

Todoroki drifts.

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He cannot feel anything inside the marble. Time passes strangely. He starts to count seconds but drops numbers, skips ahead, cannot be entirely sure his pace is accurate. It is more estimation than accuracy. A comfort of mind and something that makes him panic all at once. He does not like being caught off guard, but his measures to prevent it are failing.

He tried counting heartbeats first. It took him an uncomfortably long amount of time to realize he could not feel his heart here.

His mind a soft haze. A transparent amalgamation barely holding back complete unconsciousness. Like saran wrap stretching across his soul, rippling where the void surges to meet him. It feels like he is holding several threads of thought at once. Like he is watching them spiral out into factoids and escape routes and strategies he can see, but cannot fully comprehend. It feels like something else has shouldered him out of his brain and he is left hanging somewhere in the empty spaces of his skull. It feels like those periods of dissociation, where he traces the shifting patterns the trees outside his dorm make on his ceiling. Where the moonlight shines down on his balcony, where it hits the metal railing and refracts scraps of silver on the cream walls of his room.

There is no pain here. Well, mostly. He tried to cling to some fashion of awareness that tied into the burn of his body. But he could not. So he faded briefly before reforming himself. Building the shards of vague comprehension into something that resembled lucidity. He orbits that line of coherency now. Not touching, but absorbing the radiation that drips from it. The fear of falling still batters him, but he shoves it down to concentrate on what he knows.

He is inside a pale marble. The masked villain's Quirk. A storage pocket, a dimple in the unblemished surface of space. He remembers

the white hair of his half-uncle. A cascade of wiry spines. The distant, blurred recollections of childhood. Ink-stained fingers twice the size of his own tracing lines into parchment. Here are the anchors, the stabilizers, the primary seal set to puncture the fabric of the universe at a drop of blood. Careful, Kakashi. Watch your brushstrokes. Watch your spacing. Did I ever tell you about the time your father tried to shove a kunai into a scroll he had accidentally inverted? Tsunade patched up the hole in his leg, but couldn't do anything about the one in his pride.

You're smarter than he is though. You are going to take the world by force. You are gonna do good, kid. I believe in you.

Stop. Concentrate. He peels himself away from the past with surgical precision. What is your status? Can you fight?

Second and third degree burns twist over his arms. Blistering red skin interspaced with cracked black. Like someone had turned him to char. They center on his forearms, where he broke through Dabi's wall of blue flame. What about his wrist? Hands dark with skin grafts held his right arm behind his body. Did fire rise from Dabi's pores then? Does he have the shape of fingerprints seared into his pale flesh?

Pop. His arm wrenched up when he heaved himself backward, through the tear in space leaking purple fumes. Dislocated shoulder. Humerus fractures? Possible but unlikely. What can he do with this? What has he done?

He is fifteen, in that strange period of time in his life that never really sunk into the folds of his brain. He can remember it in the vaguest sense, parse through memory more composed of the text in reports after the fact than the actual scenes of missions. Crystal sharp vision, Sharingan carved into his skull, blocks the ends of encounters. The final days of violence. The sharp snap of a ten-week surveillance operation into frantic movement.

He's barely out of Anbu training, his father's sword in a scarred palm and arms wrapped with new muscle and soul honed with tragedy. At fourteen, he spent 72 hours hauling bodies out of rubble then stood in the Hokage's office (not his sensei's office, not the woodpaneled room with its overflowing bookshelves and Uzoshio-inspired tapestries from his wedding day and box of sunflowers that every once in a while would incite shouting matches as a hurried ninja accidentally stepped in them. That office was destroyed, crushed flat with fallen rubble. This room is part of the Hokage manor, opened to the public without any

concern for the ghosts that had not yet vacated the premises.) At fourteen, he signed up for black ops with Kushina's blood still in his hair and fingers shaking with the three soldier pills he had crushed between his teeth and a hole in his mind the same dimensions of the sucking wound that carved the last two people of his family apart. Sarutobi looked at him with the sagging eyes of a man who never truly had a moral compass, as most of them in the eternal bloodshed did not, but a man who still hoped to someday grow one. To bury the faces of those who haunt his dreams in fallow earth and pray they somehow turn into idealistic fields for children's play. The dark eyes of a man who had his view of the world reaffirmed and he isn't disappointed, not betrayed by this reminder, but just accepting in the terrible way people can be.

Sarutobi looked at him with the dark eyes of a dictator and set him loose on the world.

He is fifteen, with new talents built around a single purpose, built for a single conquest. He is a tool, is falling on old principles to make sense of this strange life-without-light. He isolates and trains and tries to lose himself in the reassurance that if he's not human, he cannot feel guilt. If he's a dog, a tool following the instructions of those that leash him, he cannot be responsible for the blood on his hands.

(It doesn't work very well, but then again, it never has.)

He is fifteen, two hundred and eighteen days into the creeping crawl of engineered war for the purpose of peace. His squad is composed of three Anbu groups, teams of five seamlessly overlapping in the rhythm drilled into their bones. They camp in the thick woods at the very north of Kaminari, a hundred of miles from Kumo, and incite violence along the twisting border Kori rebels pick at. True secession is just weeks away. There is a proclamation coming soon, an order sent from farmers to a king.

Kakashi helped draft this proclamation, in a sense. The bloodstains that soak the edges are his doing. His team has been strategically removing commanding officers from each side. They have whittled at common sense with the consuming paranoia of shadows and fed secrets to each side. Some of them are even true. Now the most aggressive captains on either side are in power. Soldiers accelerated too fast up the chain of command to learn patience, but slowly enough that they do not fear for their safety.

Konoha's Anbu teams are the hidden blades pressed against the smalls

of politician's backs, the whispers telling captains to press forward forward forward in a desperate charge, the stretches of mud stalling supply chains, the flames that eat the world. Kakashi has learned many things here. He's lost many things too.

One of the most important: his distaste for the heavy reek of war. He found it at age six on the killing fields of the Kusa marshes. It sat in the back of his throat then, gagging him even with the layers his mask provided. The scent was tangible, inescapable. It sunk into clothes and stung his eyes and followed him hundreds of miles home to Konoha. There was a saying, spoken during the Second War and partially forgotten until the Third one rolled around. An adage on how to measure dedication, on how to measure bravery.

If a soldier came home reeking of Death, he truly is courageous. Those who don't must have slipped away, must have fled, must have escaped their duty. Those who have managed to wash the grit away must be ashamed. Those who stayed within command tents and village walls must be cowards shying from the magnificence of war, must be falling short in that bloody competition that reduces men to their base states and lizard cores.

It's shortened, obviously. Kakashi's heard it passing. An old woman with a needle darting between her fingers will remark on the state of the shinobi trudging through the front gate. Her husband will pin a blanket to the laundry line and reply, "Well, those who reek of Death." And they will both nod in the manner of people who know nothing Kakashi does and everything he doesn't.

In the thick woods of Kaminari, watching volleys of water bullets and the shriek of shrapnel filled explosive tags, he does not even notice the smell. It makes sense to him. Revulsion is a very human characteristic, and he is not very human. Not anymore. A shinobi who shies at the thought of the boiling mire of political, ethical, military decay Anbu steep their bones in, they are not fit for blackops. If a man flinches at the thought of mass murder blocked out in crisp text and justified under the guise of ceramic masks and dictator-prescribed duty, they cannot wear the tattoo.

One of the first assignments given to Kakashi was to kill a city.

He has learned many things in Anbu. Most are skills he could not pick up elsewhere. Others are the sharp definitions of his limits, of how hard he can push himself before he falls. And a very few are the ones that sink into the sucking pit in his chest. The same abyss that hides

his sense of mortality and humor and

Notes:

Todokashi isn't eating enough. He created his diet as to what an adult would eat. He's a growing teenager. Explanation on to why he has little to no energy (besides depression) and why his fighting is sloppy. Also has no one to train with. He doesn't realize how much he's degraded until he meets Gai again.

He cuts corners with his logic. He couldn't be kicked out of school but he needed to help his friends. The most simple solution in his eyes was to not use his powers

Exhaustion shouldn't be the drawback to his powers or if it is, it must be hard for him to reach it. By not eating or sleeping or taking care of himself he's actually limiting his ability.

Continuity error with right fingers? Moonfish fight cut tendons? Or did it not.

Todoroki cools his skin when he's making steam so as not to get scalded. Condensation on his skin because of this.

Conversation: Todoroki realizes Bakugou is just like Izuku, they both throw themselves into situations without an ounce of concern for their safety. So motivated by their ideals (Izuku to help people and Bakugou to win/be in control/be the best) that they will lunge straight onto the spears of their enemies. Both created this image they have to aspire to. They stuck a stake to the ground and chained themselves to it, lit themselves on fire as a beacon. They both won't move. The pigheaded stubbornness carries a confusing mix of blazing heroics and the imagery of a bird beating itself against a window.

Bakugou does not like being compared to Izuku.

Bakugou believes that most of people's actions are made in opposition to him. He tries to relate this to Todoroki but struggles because he doesn't believe it. Todoroki infers because he recognizes this self-martyrdom. Bakugou rages and rebels because he thinks people are trying to put him in a box or keep him from his goal. Life is a competition and he is going to win. People being nice confuses him.

That's really fucking sad.

Todoroki realizes that in the end, the kid in front of him is exactly that. A kid. Bakugou is 16 years old. Just because Todoroki had fought through wars, bathed in blood, wasted in rotten flesh in the marshes of Ame and clawed desperately at enemies after losing his weapons and held his subordinates intestines in, hands guttering with green light as he pulled the limited basics of healing he knew to the forefront of his mind. Just because he has looked a man in the eye before snapping his neck and set plains on fire and waded through trenches of water black with algae and blood, does not mean he can assume other people could at that age. He realizes again what he already knew. Child soldiers exist in this world, but they are known by different names. They fight different battles. They are not supposed to witness war, but a scrubbed down and bleached version of it branded for the public eye. Bakugou is a kid and he's in pain and he has a bunch of issues and is struggling to work through them without confronting them or asking for help and the result is this blind rage that blazes so brightly people forget that anger is a secondary emotion. It's not a base state. It's a reaction, a progression from jealousy or desperation or fear.

Bakugou has not lived the life Todoroki has, but he views the world as a constant contest and he must pull himself to the top. Todoroki cannot begin to understand why. He can guess, but guesses impair judgement. Assumptions warp perspective. Right now all he knows is that Bakugou is in pain, tired, and scared. And scared because he is scared. The terrible thing about creating an all-powerful, immortal version of yourself is the horrible bewilderment when you fall. Bakugou made himself invulnerable and now, chained to a chair and disabled with anti-Quirk cuffs, Todoroki can catch flickers of sincere bafflement in the shifting sea of emotions breaking over the kid's face.

Why do you hate Izuku? I'm—I'm supposed to be the best. Bakugou says something to that extent. Bakugou does not know what to think about Izuku. He confuses him. His motivations are incomprehensible

to Bakugou. Tragically so. Izuku approaches the world with this terrifying optimism and hope. Bakugou is used to thinking of everyone as competition and when this worthless kid keeps following him everywhere, supposedly for his power, he does not understand it. Other people make sense because other people compete with him in his mind. But Izuku, on account of his Quirklessness and idiotic appreciation of Bakugou, cannot. Bakugou, like most people, fears what he cannot understand. And Izuku now threatens Bakugou even now, with his unexpected strength, relationship to All Might, and circle of allies. His self-esteem is completely shot. He can only imagine Izuku is doing what he does out of some form of conceit, of looking down on him. Like he is a punchline that everyone around him is sharing but he cannot get.

Bakugou asks about Todoroki's plan. Todoroki asks, "what is the most powerful thing in the world?"

"Strength," Bakugou says instantly. His face twists and he amends, "intelligence."

"Both actually," Todoroki replies. He leans forward the best he can and very carefully does not flinch when the straps around his shoulder press into this swollen tissue. Bakugou's face wavers like a mirage, a kaleidoscope of solemn fury speckled with exhaustion, stress, apprehension, fear.

Todoroki stares into red eyes burning, burning, burning like the white fire sheltered in his ribcage. "It's knowledge."

Bakugou's mouth twists like he's about to say something so Todoroki speaks first. He's fully aware of Bakugou's opinions now, his views on pleasant lies and slim fingers cautiously tracing nets of syndicates to find their underpinnings. But their situation is delicate. Bakugou might hate himself afterwards, for abandoning the ideals he martyrs himself on, but Todoroki would rather that than his death. There is no time for empty, uncontrolled anger in this battle.

"Listen to me," he says and Bakugou's teeth click together with an irritated snap. "Trust me," he says and Bakugou's jaw jumps with tension. "We cannot win this with sheer force. There is no humiliation in escaping. That is just as much as a victory for us as fighting our way out."

End result: Bakugou sees Todoroki as capable and trusts/respects him.

Todoroki and Bakugou immediately post kidnapping

How did they detain the two of them? Todoroki puts up a wild fight, knives and fire and martial arts, before Compress finally puts him back in a marble.

Description of the marble? Todoroki fucking hates it but there is also a strange, kind certainty about it. He cannot feel pain in the marble. He cannot feel much of anything. He fucking hates it but at the same time, he uses it to collect his scattered thoughts. Takes stock of his concussion. Description of Todoroki dissociating?

Taken out and tied up to a chair in a room of the bar. Bakugou is across from him, staring at him.

Todoroki's injuries: heavy burns across arms, slash through forearm, really fucking bad concussion (grade 2/3?), dislocated arm, scratches from sliding across the ground, plastic melted on hand from knife handle.

League pulls a back door doctor up. TODOROKI KNOWS THE DOCTOR THOUGH AHHHHH. ITS SADBOIZZ. When he pushes everyone out the room so he can check on Todoroki's injuries, Todoroki says a key phrase. "Rokudaime sends his regards." Saidboizz stills, hands hovering above the burn marks. "Ah, does he?"

Todoroki creates a plan. Similar to break Tokoyami out one: Sadboizz takes over his admin account and pays Giran big money. Giran gives base layouts and they plan from the inside of the prison.

Todoroki and Sadboizz meet twice. First time is the initial check up: Todoroki gives Sadboizz password to collect information from Giran. He is ruthless too, because he is aware Sad could betray him.

INTRODUCTION OF ITACHI: CROW WITH RED EYES PECKS ON WINDOW, ITS CARRYING A SCRAP OF PAPER WARNING THEM THAT GIRAN IS GONNA SELL HIM OUT

(Cut scene to anti board. Todokashi has a deadman's switch set up to automatically funnel a bit of the info he has out into the chat site. It's all coded based on anbu code but that's crackable if you give it a lot of effort. The code sends the info to the heroes after three days without contact from todokashi. The key is sent after five

As soon as todokashi vanishes from the mortal plane, the switch flips

Rolling code based on icha Icha. Given date/time 14:30 on December tenth, it organizes to (12/10/14:30) and converts to volume 12 of the icha icha series, chapter 10, 14th page in, and 30 lines down. Updates every 15 minutes. Nearly impossible to crack

Itachi finds it)

Sadboizz later confirms this information when he overhears Giran selling the League some information: turns out to be about Todoroki's backstory. Shigaraki was incredibly angry Todoroki was brought in (that's who he hired/teamed up with Hero Killer to take out after all), but with prodding from Giran, Sensei telling him to look further into it, and Kurogiri trying to keep him calm, he rethinks his point of view. Later, when he fully understands the information, he thinks Todoroki is just like him.

Then Todoroki is brought back to a room with Bakugou. Sadboizz promises to come tomorrow to finish checking him up.

Second stock of Todoroki's injuries: burns bandaged, slash bandaged, no x-ray taken but Sad tells Todoroki not to think too much or whatever. Todoroki ignores. Shoulder back in socket, antiseptic on scratches, plastic cut away from his palm and bandaged. He is VERY heavily sedated. Enough he has a vague recollection of what is going on, but not too much.

League sedated him as soon as they got him out of the marble. Sad pretended to, and tries to be on call when they need to sedate him again. It helps first of all for the pain and second of all to suppress his Quirk. He is also in those Quirk bracers.

Close call when Dabi almost sedates him. Interactions with all the League? Guard shift rotations.

Dabi first while Todoroki is completely out of it. Shifts over to Lizard, who falls asleep.

Lizard (asleep): Bakugou catches Todoroki up to date. He is so fucking worried omg. The stress is making Bakugou snap while Todoroki is going quiet. Todoroki goes straight to "we are going to be tortured for information". He knows that they might try to recruit them, however. He is a pessimist. He and Bakugou dissociate and have awkward conversation in turn.

Twice (scrolls through his phone most of the time, reads the other, listens to music loudly enough he cannot hear the two of them): Todoroki starts really feeling the pain and also starts outlining the plan in his head. Brief conversation with Bakugou because he saw more of the end. The two of them are still hell stressed.

Toga (stares like the adorable psychobitch she is): Toga actually tries to interact with them. It starts as a questioning for Bakugou about Midoriya. The girl is obsessed with him, but moves onto Tsuyu and Uraraka. She wants to know everything and isn't happy when Bakugou curses her out. It's like flipping a switch. As soon as she is mad, she's fucking mad. Thinks out loud about how useful Bakugou really is if they already have a much better spare. Todoroki steps in (verbally lol) and manages to distract her. He is so fucking good at this shit Bakugou is shaking in his boots. It has been sixteen hours at this point.

Magne (hauls in a TV and also is on her phone): Todoroki notices that none of the villains text anyone. It's kinda indicative of their characters. The news sources are running a train on U.A. CUTS TO A CLIP OF ENDEAVOR BEING QUESTIONED. Magne is nice af. I fucking love her. Queen. Todoroki thinks about Endeavor. Bakugou side eyes him. Very obviously want to ask him about it but doesn't want to with Magne in the room. She starts to talk to them too, but not with the same wild mania as Toga. Todoroki gets the sense she is the kind of person who ended up this way because of ~society~.

He is dozing when the clip cuts to Endeavor and he immediately jerks awake. Not panicked, but tense as hell.

Magne notices and switches the channel.

Todoroki has an inner debate about nature vs nurture and what inspires people to crime. Magne notices his bracelet. It's a reminder that he is a child. He's physically 16 years old and he flinches whenever he hears his dad and he is in a lot of pain. Magne is a complicated character but I don't believe she's without a conscious. Maybe talks to them about Hero Killer? Says that in a perfect world, the one he wanted to build, they wouldn't have to interact like this. Later, when Todoroki reveals/Giran lets it slip that Todoroki is the one that took out Hero Killer as the man was trying to kill him, she has to rethink her views in a way.

After Magne leaves, no one comes in to replace her. There is about an hour where Bakugou and Todoroki just stare at the ceiling. But then,

Bakugou speaks up. "So, your dad."
"Hm?"

"Is he why you," shoulder shake like he wants to move his hands to gesture vaguely about panic attack.

Todoroki hums and leans back in his chair. He doesn't say anything, does not plan on saying anything, but Bakugou speaks up again.

"I don't hate Deku."

LONG ASS ANALYSIS ABOUT THE PUNCH DURING THEIR HERO FIGHT

Bakugou gets Todoroki's need for an exchange of information. Something for something. He talks and they kind of have a conversation about it. Another analysis of Bakugou's character. Todoroki still doesn't think he's a person he would want to hang out with, but he's not evil.

He makes a joke afterwards to get Bakugou riled up again. It fixes the mood.

They start getting tired. Todoroki keeps waking up to find seconds have passed.

Todoroki talks a bit about Endeavor.

Bakugou is out. But then Dabi comes up and grabs a chair. He straddles it and slouches forward to stare at Todoroki. He smiles like he knows how to break everything in this world.

His nose is bruised, but you can barely tell over his scar tissue. He sits across Todoroki and flicks his flames on and off. Todoroki stares back.

Dabi smirks and starts to speak. About what? Endeavor? He tries to get under Todoroki's skin with small hints of information. "So who was that bird kid you were trying to protect, Shouto? You got friends? Does Endeavor know?"

Todoroki doesn't respond. He sits and breathes through the pain and tries to pull any relevant information he can from Dabi. Oh! He riles Dabi up in turn. He first looks at Bakugou to make sure the kid is asleep before asking Dabi about the Reformers. Asks him how he got to the League. Goes off on Hero Killer Stain when Dabi says something about him. MANAGES TO GET UNDER HIS SKIN A BIT BY GUESSING

ABOUT DABIS BACKGROUND BUT HITS LITERALLY EVERY NAIL BUT THE ENDEAVOR ONE. THAT'S WHAT DABI IS SALTY BUT DOES NOT GO OVERBOARD. BECAUSE HE KNOWS WHAT TODOROKI DOESN'T. WHEN HE LAUGHS AT TODOROKI'S PRETTY FUCKIN GOOD DIGS, TODOROKI REALIZES THAT DABI HAS INFO HE DOESN'T.

"It's not going to work, what he tried. Trying to kill off heroes instead of letting the courts handle it? Some of them deserved it, but not all. Sometimes he killed just to kill. Maimed just to maim. Who does and does not qualify as heroic enough. All Might? Just All Might? Even if heroes were only in it for money, why the fuck should he care. That's what police do, and heroes are an extension of the police force in that they are government contracts. The only difference is publicity. What do you call a policeman who only does his job for money? A fucking policeman. Removing heroes based solely on their morals and not on the work they do will only let crime spread."

(fuck the police, obviously, but go off king)

Dabi asks him about Endeavor. Todoroki replies that as long as the man saves the majority of people, it makes up what he did as property damage, as the minor collateral injuries villains received.

Dabi leans in, fire dancing through his fingers and eyes full of the slow, intelligent anger that razes cities. "So it's fine, what he does to you. To Fuyumi? To your mother?"

Todoroki does something that causes his burns to hurt and he hisses. "I think you're entirely too coherent," Dabi says and reaches for the morphine.

He gives Todoroki a lot. Something bordering on too much. Todoroki watches him squeeze the plunger into the IV and wonders if he is going to die here, from the sheer, rage inspired stupidity of a villain.

Then his eye closes. He sleeps.

Wakes up to Bakugou kicking him. He is still super fucking out of it. It is the morning of the third day? Night of the second day?

Shouji and Tokoyami talk.

-

He opens the door of his house with sweat sticking his shirt to his back and is immediately jumped on by a wild mass of fur. He takes an earbud out and laughs loudly before remembering the time. The twins should already be asleep. If he wakes them up, Souko will make him put them back to bed. He loves the kids, but he can only read the same bedtime story so many times before his legs start bouncing with the need to move.

“Shh, Tarou.” He pushes the big dog off his chest and bends down to receive a face full of slobber. The rapid click of claws resounds down the hall as Kichirou races to meet him. He puts a large palm out to stop the bulldog’s momentum and smiles as Kichirou shoves his head right into his hand. A more sedated pad of paws follows as Ichirou lumbers out of the dining room.

He crouches down with a hand in Tarou’s ruff and another scratching between Kichirou’s ears. “Where’s the last one?” He asks in a stage whisper. Ichirou sniffs his arm but doesn’t answer. He grins and gently knocks his head against the greyhound’s neck. “Anyone seen—”

A cold nose jams into the back of his neck and he yelps as Jeff starts licking the sweat off his face. “An unfair play, my friend!” He pulls his fingers from Tarou’s mane to push the Blue Heeler away. “Next time I’ll take you out with me. If you have enough energy for ambushing, twenty miles should be a breeze.”

There is a snort from the hallway and he looks up to see Souko standing with a hand on her hip. “That’s a good idea. He’s getting fat. Someone keeps feeding him scraps.”

“I have no idea who would do such a thing!” He replies before peeling himself out of the tangle of dogs. Tarou tries to jump again, but he plants a palm on the Bernese Mountain dog’s snout. Jeff takes his standing position as an invitation to begin licking the backs of his knees.

“You want any food?” Souko asks. She starts walking back towards the kitchen. The dogs immediately notice where she is headed and follow.

He unlocks his phone and pauses his music. The song cuts off just as the trumpets pick up for one of the member’s verses. It’s a great one to end his run on. When the bass pounds in time to his footfalls on the sidewalk, he feels like he can run forever. The variety of music still awes him. There is so much and it’s all in his phone, ready at any

second to set his veins burning with adrenaline and his heart racing, desperate to run and work and breathe until his muscles fail underneath him. He takes his other earbud out and gently winds them around his phone as he trails after the parade of dogs. “I would enjoy that very much!”

“Me too,” Souko replies. “You wanna make some?”

He grins even as he sees through her trick. “Yes ma’am.”

They are eating eggs when his phone chimes with a news alert. Souko pauses her sentence about his hair (it’s growing out and he should probably take care of it before Camie tries to cut it again). They do not tense, but they do still for a second. He only tracks hero news, specifically flashes and updates about Haru’s agency. Cloud Dancer is not the most popular hero ever, but she does rank within the top two hundred. She’s working on a large operation right now, one that keeps her out late and brings home bandages and bruises.

He taps on the alert and faces his phone so both he and Souko can read it. And—

The first emotion that hits him is relief. Because it’s not Haru, not anywhere near where she is working. Next to him, Souko lets out a little sigh.

But then he reads over the second paragraph again, sees the names there, and his black eyes narrow.

“You know them from school?” Souko asks.

He shakes his head, still staring at the text. “No, this is—this is something else. Possibly.”

Souko tilts her head. “Is that the guy—”

He picks up his phone and pockets it before she can finish that thought.

(He’s been thinking it too, but he has lived long enough to know what happens to your heart when you unthinkingly believe in something that may not even be right. He has lived a very long time, has seen many failed hopes wither and many dreams fall short. He is a man who has lived for, who has been defined by, lost causes and impossible futures. But under the overbearing optimism that he epitomizes, there are shreds of realism still drilled into his bones.

Because he knows that there is a limit on how hard you can work to make your dreams come true. It's distant, but it is there like a glass ceiling you can only see when you're crushed against it. He used to think he could change it, that he could twist fate and then walk on glass floors. But he is older, wiser maybe, and when he wears a blinding grin he remembers to not let it sear away his vision of what is possible and what is practical.

See, he lives for tearing down boundaries, for pulverizing his fingers with fractures and letting them heal and becoming stronger for it. He is stronger than most pro-heroes and better than his classmates and he could easily be a symbol for others to race towards. When music thrums through his earbuds and drums beat heavy in tempo with his feet on pavement, he swears he can do anything.

But he knows that there are some things that he has no control over. And this one, the possibility rattling around inside his soul, is one of those even he with all his might could not influence.)

(He was in Anbu too, afterall.)

"I'm gonna go take a shower," he says with a smile, sidestepping her question. He starts to pick up his and Souko's plates.

"I can take care of those," Souko waves him off. "Go shower and sleep. You're training with your other mom tomorrow."

He is almost to the stairs when she speaks up again.

"Hey, you know I'm proud of you, right?"

He turns to look at her, watches as she rests her face on a hand and leans against the table.

"I know that it's complicated, but you are my kid. And I can say with the certainty of a mother that you have grown so much. I'm proud of you, and Haru is too. We are both so thankful to have you in this family."

When Souko smiles, when his mother smiles, she has laugh lines around the corners of her eyes. Under the soft yellow of the kitchen lamp, her grey hairs are prominent against her natural black. The hand she cradles her chin in has started to crease with age, but the ring there is as bright as ever. She is wonderful and brilliant and he feels pressure building behind his eyes.

“Thanks, mom.” He grins bright and happy and hopeful. She snorts again and shoos him away.

By the time he has finished showering and retreated to his room, the smile has faded to the normal calm of his resting face. But something serious flickers in his eyes as he opens his laptop. There is steel in his bones, determination threading through every muscle. He pulls up an article about the latest League attack, puts on a pair of headphones, and starts to read.

“Bakugou Katsuki and Todoroki Shouto, son of the number two hero Endeavor and well known for almost doubling the previous U.A. Entrance Exam record and winning the U.A. Sports Festival, were kidnapped by villains from their summer training camp tonight. Ten associates of the League of Villains, a notorious syndicate that has recently come into the public eye, carried out the attack. In addition to the two kidnapped students, fifteen members of the first year hero class are in critical condition from a gas attack and ten have other injuries of varying degree. We reached out to Endeavor for a statement about his son’s kidnapping, but we have not yet received a reply.”

He runs a hand through his short hair and drums his fingers on the base of his skull to the rolling beat of a song. They are strange, he thinks as he gazes at the picture accompanying the article, the differences between these worlds. The boy who stares back at him has soft white hair, an eyepatch, a school uniform with creases in the shirt and a tie that hangs loosely around his neck. The kid is young, surrounded by people, his visible eye half closed with something like a smile.

He tabs out of the article and leans back against his pillows, hands tangling and legs crossing as he thinks. A breeze seeps through his open window and, purely out of habit, he pulls it to twist around his room. The posters on his wall ripple and the medals draped over a hook clink together like windchimes. He stares at the ceiling and breathes.

Here is a fact about Yoarashi Inasa: that is not his name.

Chapter 14- Interrogation

Sadboizz comes in to check on Todoroki. Todoroki hands over the plan, revealing the locations of a safehouse he owns, a car he also

owns for some reason, and a shit ton of money for supplies. They go over Giran's information. Messages to the oc squad. Less mention about them, no povs. Just confirmations and stuff. Dronehead finds the Noumu and relays the info to a team. Takayama and wallflower go to warehouse to take out Noumu at night. Shouji still sees them. Black Ram goes to help Todoroki. How? Idk yet.

"They are at their highest right now. They believe themselves invincible. Even if we were to attack, how would we do it? Where would we do it? If we strike here, they will either run, use us as hostages, or gather resources and buckle down. We can't fight our way out of this one. How do you distract the jailer?"

"How?"

"You set the jail on fire."

The plan basically is to bomb the shit out of the secondary warehouse location and hope for the best. Either the villains will rush out to defend that location (where the Noumu are) and slash or the heroes will go to investigate and find some shit that will eventually lead them to the bar. It's very likely the plan will go FUBAR or just not work period, but he's been in more dangerous situations with less thought out plans.

There is another shorter rotation, then Shigaraki pulls Todoroki and Bakugou out for an interrogation. He is manic but deadly smart under the child like demeanor. Bakugou tells him to fuck off after he finishes outlining why Bakugou should join them. But then he turns to Todoroki.

Or, Shigaraki completely ignores Bakugou. He fixates intensely on Todoroki the entire time. His opinion is reversed. I think Shigaraki sees things in black and white. He's either manic or apathetic, childish or strategic, angry or burning cold.

"We could use you, much better than anyone else can. You are wasted in school. You are better than most of the pros. You could beat them easily. With a few of us on your side, you could kill Endeavor."

Dabi is leaning forward, scarred face twisting into a grin.

It's not tempting, but they do have a lot of things going for them. Todoroki is aware of how he looks/acts. He is aware of the burden of revenge. The weight of legacy pressing against his shoulders.

But then Shigaraki pulls up receipts and Todoroki realizes that someone has betrayed him. ITACHI, who Todoroki is hoping and is not hoping is Itachi at all, WAS RIGHT. And then Giran walks back in from a smoke, discretely grabs a paycheck from Kurogiri, and leaves.

Todoroki knows not to trust Giran, but he assumed he could trust the money he spent on the man. He overestimated himself. He was wrong.

What else was he wrong about.

Shigaraki fucking goes in on Endeavor. He has one of those stalker pics from when Todoroki was hella bruised and he shows it to him. Bakugou goes still next to him.

“You would want to kill the man, wouldn’t you. Who wouldn’t want to destroy the most hypocritical hero. The man who made your life a living hell while so many people praised him. If you join us, you can tear him apart. No more trying to be his legacy (THIS ONE HURTS), no more being forced to take this, no more being ignored by other pro-heroes. Do you think Endeavor could keep this hidden? Of course someone knows. Which one of your teachers? Did Eraserhead find out and never act on it? He is so smart after all, so good at finding secrets. But he never did anything, did he.”

The television is on and Aizawa just finished defending Bakugou. A reporter stands up and asks about Todoroki, mentioning him first as Endeavor’s son.

“See,” Shigaraki hisses. “They don’t think of you as your own person. You are just his son. All your accomplishments are attributed to him. How much did he train you? How hard did he force you to work for this?”

Shigaraki crumples the photo of a very small Todoroki in a school uniform that hangs off him and bruises in the shapes of fists just barely visible when he shifts. Shigaraki disintegrates it.

“We know how you got that scar,” he whispers with a voice steeped and acidity and hoarse for it. “We know what he drove your mother to do. Is that why you cannot sleep? What does it feel like for the only person you could trust, who tried to stand up for you, carved your eye from your face? What does it feel like to be considered a perfect replica of the man who gave you those burns? How does it feel to be abandoned in his shadow by your own siblings? How does it feel to know you will never be saved?”

Bakugou is almost screaming at him to shut up, but Todoroki is perfectly still. He is cold. His eye grey and flat and empty. But under his skin, fire burns.

“I was the same,” Shigaraki says. He is wide eyed and fanatic. His cracked lips drip with vicious ichor. “The greatest hero could not save me in my time of need. They passed over me. They left a child to rot. But instead—” He spreads his arms wide and leans back, tilting his pale face towards the fluorescent lights as he breathes in the stale air of the bar. “Instead, I was taken in by my Sensei. Instead, I inherited an empire. The heroes could not help me so I helped myself and look at what I built!”

He crowds back into Todoroki’s space. They are polar opposites, a calm sea meeting the surging waters spilling through a broken dam. They are mania and apathy. Excited and blank. A face of wild energy, frothing with near mad idealism, sinking light into a porcelain mask, a black hole of emotion.

“Todoroki Shouto, think of what we could create together with your power, with your influence. Imagine how all the people who abandoned you, who passed over you, will feel when they see you standing beside me on the movement we create. Think of how they will look at your father, think of how he will shake with rage and regret he could not see your full potential. You are wasted here, playing the games of heroes. Together, we can make a world they don’t exist in. A world where no one stares blindly at false saviors. Together, we destroy the society that abandoned us.”

And Todoroki stares back with the man’s red, shining eyes. He looks past broken blood vessels and flaking skin and lank hair. With a grey eye that pulls light into it, that devours the wrath in this room and turns it into liquid gold that paints his ribs and threads his veins with an undying flame, he stares into Shigaraki’s soul.

His mouth is dry under his mask and his throat raspy from inhaling smoke, but his voice does not crack, does not waver. “Wouldn’t,” he says with weaponized neutrality concealing an eternity of purpose swelling inside his chest, “that be the same as what you said the heroes have done, to parade me with your League under my father’s name? Isn’t that,” he asks with iron in his tone, “hypocritical of you?”

Shigaraki blinks and is generally shooketh. He leans back

Ch. 15

Then, he summons his employees, Bakugou, and Todoroki to the warehouse.

Todoroki is already lunging at All of One when Shouji sprints out, grabs Bakugou and Tokoyami under his arms, and pulls some complex team move with the squad to get them the fuck off the battlefield. It happens before All Might comes in because Shouji is amazing.

Shouji grabs everyone and puts his arms out like wings. Iida wraps an arm around his waist and powers his repulsor blast to get them going mach speed. They grab Bakugou and he shoots an explosion towards the ground as they jump and they are flying. DS comes out to help.

The LOV is passed out. There is a whole line through the earth where All for One ripped it apart. Todoroki faces this fucking monster of a dude who reminds of Pein leveling his village, and tries not to run screaming.

He doesn't, because that is who Todoroki is. He has found his purpose and now that he has grabbed onto it, he is never letting go. He lives to protect the people he cares about, and goddammit if they want to label him a fucking hero because of that, let them. He will be a hero if that means making sure shit like this never happens again.

SOMETIME INASA AND TODOROKI FINALLY MEET UP AND INASA HUGS HIM REALLY HARD AND PUTS A HAND ON THE BACK OF HIS NECK, PALM COVERING HIS MEDULA AND VULNURABLE NAPE. DAMN. FUCK.

Chapter 16- A Loss

Todoroki manages to hold his own against All for One for approximately five minutes.

Much, much later, he will find out how impressive this is.

Much, much later, he will find out what took All Might so long. The

man was trying to find Bakugou and Tokoyami in the bar, before getting a call from Best Jeanist. All for One had taken them. TODOROKI TOLD HIM THEY WERE UPSTAIRS SOMEWHERE.

Todoroki holds his own against All for One for approximately five minutes. He employs all the tricks he and Midoriya practiced, every inch he fought for and every hour spent studying instead of sleeping.

It starts with haze, then desperate attacks that All for One bats away with ease. Then, Todoroki tries what he never has before.

He makes a glacier, lets it grow and lets the front kick in. Then he melts it with fire, lets that front rise.

There is a small crackle at first, then nothing. Todoroki gets blasted against a piece of masonry so hard he feels something crack. He pours everything into the technique, bending his quirk in ways he never has before.

It's all hydrogen and oxygen, he thinks.

There's the crackle again, then something in him gives way, and Todoroki reaches up to the heavens and pulls lightning down.

That is how he manages to hold his own against All for One. Four minutes getting batted around and barely avoiding attacks, and one minute where All for One writhes on the ground as his nerves are seared from the inside.

And then, All for One gets up.

And he laughs.

And he pulls back a fist.

And he lets it go.

It is strange, what your brain latches onto in mortal situations.

Todoroki has been thrown against some rubble. His shin is cracked down the middle, a bump where the bone has buckled. His ribs are definitely broken again and his head is ringing.

All for One is stalking towards the Pro-Heroes collapsed on the ground.

Todoroki can still get up. He tells himself he can and while he forgets

his limits constantly, Todoroki never underestimates his ability in life or death situations.

The leg is going to be bad, he thinks to himself. But it is okay.

He has had worse.

He moves his right arm to levers himself up.

And nothing happens. He feels his arm move, it works up until where his hand should press against the grimy concrete. Then, nothing. No pressure, no rough grind of cement against his fingertips, no surface at all.

Todoroki looks over at his right arm.

It is strange, what your brain latches onto in mortal situations.

Todoroki looks over at the mangled stump where his arm used to be and can only manage one thought.

‘I lost Kouda’s bracelet,’ he thinks.

(chapter break?)

His arm ends right above the elbow. It looks horrible, all gristle and gory flesh that is dousing the concrete in blood. He should pinch the veins close, he thinks, and leans over to do just that.

He ends up with a palm slick with blood and what he hopes is an arm just bleeding from minor blood vessels. He might have to cauterize it, and he is not looking forward to it.

Gayjackiechan yells in his ear, tells him to get to the getaway car. They were almost hit by the force All for One released.

He tells them to leave without him.

There is no way he can just walk back into class with these injuries. He cannot run either, he has just found his purpose and he will not let go. He has questions and answers and he will make this work.

Okay, he is completely trapped under a building or something. He ends up calling Aizawa or something and asking for help. This is the moral of the story. Ask for help.

He watches All Might vs. All for One with greying vision.

All Might wins. TODOROKI HELPS IN SOME WAY. He stays for the clean up and watches as Todoroki is carried into an ambulance on a stretcher.

None of the news helicopters arrived in time to see the fireworks from Todoroki's fight. The heroes did see some of it though, but as they are mostly passed out no one has thought to inform All Might.

Todoroki gets loaded up in the ambulance.

(Notes from the version where Tokoyami was kidnapped instead of Todoroki, Todoroki disguised himself to sneak in so he didn't get lectured again or smth)

"You have a lot of explaining to do, young man. Starting with who you are and how did you receive the information you had to raid the base."

And Todoroki laughs or coughs up blood. "Maa, I'm sad you didn't recognize me, All Might-sensei. I must not have made that big of an impression."

All Might's face crumbles.

"Todoroki...?" he asks, and he seems to confused and defeated.

There are a thousand questions flashing across his face. Most of them, Todoroki can answer. He is thankful for that, it is the least he can do after messing the whole situation up this badly.

Todoroki thinks he has somehow lead to a lot of the pro-heroes' plan going awry.

"Todoroki, why? How did you know about this? (Why did you not tell us?)"

Todoroki is taken to the hospital.

He wakes up with a single handcuff on his wrist. He almost reaches to pull his mask up on his face, as it is disastrously low and he is in public (in a hospital no less). He has to stop though, as his arm flashes in pain and he just sees a bandaged stump.

He is in a hospital specialized in discretely treating heroes. This is where All Might got all his surgeries done, with the assistance of Recovery Girl.

He is pretty woozy from painkillers and he is fucking pissed off at himself.

Mostly because his plan did not succeed, but also because he was an idiot.

After an hour of sitting in his own pain, a whole squad of people come in.

This is apparently a matter under investigation by the pro-heroes, specifically those involved in the event and those with prior connections to him.

Tsukauchi is there, along with All Might, Present Mic, Aizawa, Nedzu, and Gran Torino.

There are so many disappointed looks.

They are very professional and closed off about it, clearly believe he might be the traitor?

Tsukauchi is part of the interrogation.

“Just for the record, can you state your name, age, and birthday?”

And it almost goes to shit.

He makes it through the first question, gets super hung up on the second, and barely passes the third. Tsukauchi asks again for his age and everyone in the room is just like, woah, who the fuck is this kid.

Todoroki says he’s not lying about his age. (He’s not telling the truth but that’s a different story)

They bring in Endeavor first. Endeavor is shooketh. Aizawa and Present Mic are fuming that Nedzu would do this. But tbh, Todoroki and Endeavor have a pretty heart to heart conversation. Kinda.

Okay there is going to have to be a beat down kind of situation where someone goes in and completely calls Todoroki on his behavior. Maybe it’s Aizawa, because they are very alike. He gets called on his

suicidal ideation, lack of applying himself, deliberately ignoring advice of those more experience than him, and just in general being a bit of a dick who throws himself into situations that regularly leave him worse off rather than grabbing the pros to help save him. Todoroki is too concentrated on himself, too dependent on himself, to be an effective hero.

ASK FOR HELP!!!

Todoroki replies that it was never his goal to be a hero, that it was his father's goal.

Aizawa replies that why does he not stop, now that his father is out of the picture. If Todoroki is not passionate about this, why is he here? Is it for the fame? The power? Because he seems to constantly chase those.

Todoroki gets riled. "Because no one else can do it as effectively as I can. Because people are stupid and the risks they take do not balance with the rewards they get. Because I can do what a lot of pro heroes twice my age cannot. Because I do have experience and I am smart and I can solve problems people debate over for years while they doing nothing. I am better than others and my talents are not being used and I am sitting here imprisoned and frustrated while two bit heroes run around and mess shit up. I took out four members of the League of Villains, I heavily injured four more. I was responsible for the disposal of the Noumu. I did what you could with less resources, less planning time, and less experience with the enemy. And you are keeping me from continuing to help people."

Aizawa realizes some of this he has to give Todoroki. But still, "You are a CHILD. We should not live in a world where you need to do all these things. You should be concerned with living, not dying for causes you have not even been affected by yet."

"But I will be affected by these things. I have already, in the case of my friend being captured by All for One. And it does not matter my age, as long as I can do something."

This goes on for a while.

Other possible Aizawa interaction:

Moon fish dies. Aizawa talks to todoroki after rescuing him from the wreckage and getting him to the hospital. Tells him moonfish died. He was burned too badly, lost too much blood.

“The only casualty from the attack was [name], alias Moonfish. He suffered from third degree burns and lost almost four liters of blood and went into hypovolemic shock before the paramedics reached him. He died in surgery.”

Todoroki says nothing. There is nothing to say. He likes Aizawa, though he doesn't trust him entirely. And that's not an insult: he doesn't trust anyone.

(He doesn't trust anyone anymore. Anyone here, in this strange world with superpowers and names for the stars and people who call themselves heroes, who's job is being a hero, who falsely wear the term or ascribe it to people who don't deserve it. People like him.)

He respects Aizawa, and that fills all the gaps of hesitance where his limited capacity to trust cracks. He knows the man as he knows himself, as he knows soldiers and teachers and leaders. And he knows the man as he once did Uzumaki Mito and Namikaze Minato. As a genuinely good person. As a man who deserves the title given to him.

Todoroki likes Aizawa, appreciates him for his many talents and his cold logic and his ability to give, as shuttered away as it is under apathy and nihilism. Todoroki likes Aizawa. Respects him. He will not lie to this man in front of him, to this commanding figure who is grown in all the ways he could never be.

So when Aizawa asks, with a voice devoid of interest, of anger, of pity, of suspicion, of contempt, “Do you regret it?”, Todoroki does not lie.

There are answers that are too heavy for words. He has tried at times, to choke up apologies or confessions or the endings of the many tragedies twisting through out his life. There are no words, cannot be any words, for the miasma of emotion in his head. To say “no” would not be lying, but it would sit strangely in the air between them. It would hang between the dust motes, sink slowly and grotesquely like syrup through the light spilling in from the windows. It would pour out of his mouth like oil and rot with what he cannot say, cannot possibly express.

Todoroki looks Aizawa in the eyes. Silver against black. Years of war against the underbelly of a society swelling with power and crime. They are both martyrs, he thinks. He is just the unfortunate kind, the type that dies for a cause lost without his knowledge, the type that has to fathom his failure, know the futility of his death, before his world

faded to black. They are both martyrs, but Aizawa is still breathing. Todoroki has been gasping for years now, coughing constantly and choking on a tremulous sense of purpose.

Silver against black. The sunset seeping through the window backlights Aizawa and casts his face in sharp blocks of color. He is statuesque, all defined lines that fade just before his eye bags, casting the angle of his cheekbones and jaw in sharp relief while smearing away the bruises under his eyes, the furrow in his brow, to an ashy shadow. His hair glows orange at the edges, a mockery of a halo. A meliorism of one from where Todoroki is sitting. He stares up at his teacher, silver meeting black, and tries not to squint as the sun shines into his eye.

He cannot say anything. There are truths too big for his mouth to fit around, words that sit in his throat and suffocate him. An inverse garrote of everything he cannot express, cannot have. There are no easy answers for this question. He has too many deaths to his name to measure out any appropriate (his perspective is shifted) amount of guilt. Todoroki stays silent and hopes Aizawa can read between the motes of dust spiraling through sunlight, the perfect emptiness of his expression, everything left unsaid that hovers like nooses and drifting contact mines in the sterile hospital air.

Aizawa blinks slowly, more of a sentence than an expression. He cards his fingers through his thick hair. The shakey halo breaks into jagged edges as his hand catches on a tangle and he has to pull to dislodge it. Aizawa tilts his head back and sighs. He is tired, exhausted to the point he is almost shaking with it. Todoroki knows from experience. He wonders when Aizawa last slept. Has he been awake since the night of the attack?

“You shouldn’t have to do that. Not again. You’re a kid, Shouto. You’re sixteen years old. You shouldn’t have to face questions like this.” Aizawa is speaking mostly to himself. His eyes are closed and his head is tilted back. Todoroki takes a breath and interrupts before Aizawa can continue.

“I’m not sure I count anymore.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I...I’ve done more, seen more, than any of my classmates. I’m at pro level. I’ve been at pro level and we both know this. Theres—“

Here he stops, struggling to find words that won’t fall apart like a

carelessly made houses of cards. "I'm irrevocably different than my peers. I don't think I should be counted as one of them in situations like this. Any other student would act tremendously differently than I in all of the situations I have been in. You should not group me with them, when thinking about what I should or should not have done, what I should or should not have experienced. Yes, I'm sixteen, but I am much older than they are too. It's bold... it's presumptions to assume I have not already faced questions like this. And we both know I'm going to keep facing them, at least after I graduate and enter the pro business. You don't need to worry about my responses to situations like these or the questions I might have concerning my own actions. I passed that horizon line long before I came to your class."

It's a long-winded way to say "I am damaged goods. You cannot save me. I cannot be saved."

WAIT TODOROKI DOES TRUST AIZAWA NOW. HE CALLED HIM. HE TRUSTS HIM.

Something something. Aizawa wraps it up. He says something like "you interrupted breakfast again kid." Puts a hair on Todoroki's head. Does the present mic thing.

Does Aizawa share something too? Like I also have trauma? Being in the foster system, living with abusive parents, dealing with ocd. He tried to take control of everything down to the minute detail because he felt like he did not have control of his life. Meeting Mic helped a lot, to have a friend that accepted you for who you were. But also, therapy.

Stalemate or mutual agreement to disagree. Nedzu is surprisingly the one that comes in and says that Todoroki is useful so he should not be imprisoned.

Conversation with Nedzu and Todoroki. Nedzu lights a cigarette. He offers one to Todoroki. Todoroki shakes his head no.

Nedzu remarks that it is good of him for trying to quit. Says that this is a horrible habit for a teenager. Todoroki replies that he knows, but that this is also a horrible habit for a teacher of impressionable teenagers.

"That's a bad habit for someone your age to have."

"It's a bad habit for a teacher to show in front of a teenager."

“But I haven’t been teaching in years, have I, Todoroki. And you have not been a teenager in years either.”

Todoroki freezes.

Nedzu motions to the recording device. He has shut it off. “This is off the record.”

“Hm.”

“I’m not going to ask who you are, because we will never get anywhere. Frankly, I would not care either, as all you humans are the same to me. You only differ in how useful you can be. And how useful are you, you who call yourself Todoroki?”

Todoroki grins with bloodstained teeth. “Very useful.”

They come to a deal in a room lit only by an interrogation lamp. There is a mutual amount of distrust in this room. They both know the other could tear them down very easily. They are stretching a rubber band made of razor blades between them and trusting the other not to let go first. Actually, they are bluffing the other to believe they have more razor blades and being bluffed in turn. They are stuck in a twisting power dynamic.

The deal is this:

Todoroki will directly report to Nedzu while carrying out heroic duties out of the limelight. He will work as a vigilante and will not be guaranteed by the government unless he has needed information on him at the time he is captured by a group of enemies. If he does not have anything they need, he will be left alone to suffer.

Nedzu will in turn provide Todoroki with a cover and keep him out of jail.

Todoroki asks how he is going to convince the government to do this. Nedzu replies that he already has years ago (or that it will be very easy? Nedzu has lots of money and money speaks, as does usefulness. He is also scarily smart and outwits people.)

Todoroki’s cover will be that he is in physical therapy, recovering from a wound he received at camp. He will attend school four times a week, sleeping in the dorms at those times. Otherwise, he will be ‘at the hospital.’

In actuality he will be doing the dirty work needed to keep the peace, specifically the dirty work needed by Nedzu. This mostly involves prevention of assassination/defamation. It will eventually spread out into dealing with Overhaul.

Todoroki asks how long he is to keep this up before he is allowed to return to normal hero work. Nedzu replies his whole school career, three years. For the first couple of years as a hero, he will still be expected to make these undercover runs.

During his school year, he will expected to go undercover for a group every once in a while and rot them from the inside.

Todoroki asks how Nedzu could know to expect this of him (how does Nedzu know he has the talent?)

Nedzu gets up. "Don't bullshit me, you who call yourself Todoroki. We are both more than geniuses. We are prodigies and we stand out from normal creatures as much as light stands out from darkness. I expect to see you working in a month."

"It takes six months to a year to adjust to a new limb with physical therapy."

Nedzu laughs. "So I will see you in a month."

Todoroki just nods.

Aizawa pulls up and forces Nedzu to put Todoroki in therapy.

"He needs a year to recover."

"He can get a month."

"No."

"Yes."

"Then make him go to therapy for that month."

"...Sure."

-

Endeavor interaction

Aight so Endeavor. He's a dick. But he's human, you know? I hate him,

I'm sure almost everyone who has read about him hates him, but he is still a multidimensional person. Not an excuse for his actions at all, but an explanation as to why he cares about Shouto even after he kicked him out. What he expected after Shouto left his house was for Shouto to come back after a day. He had no previous indication that Shouto hated him (which Shouto didn't, but Endeavor didn't know that Shouto gave so little thought to him that he wouldn't even consider trying to contact him). So when Shouto got a dorm room at U.A., never asked for money, and basically fucked right out of his life (rightfully), Endeavor was shaken. He viewed Shouto as a mini version of himself. That Shouto is first of all gay (and defying the mold Endeavor created for him there) and second of all not reliant on him, is outlandish in his mind.

He is starting to think that he has fucked up. Granted, this is only because his ""creation"" is flipping him off and disappearing into a beautiful rainbow sunset, but it is a major shift in Endeavor's life. He goes from self-satisfied and certain that what he is doing is right (best for himself) to realizing that he does not control over everything. And that the smaller, 'better' version of himself finds him wanting.

Okay so I'm going to be a bit delicate when I move on to the next point cause this really isn't aligned with a lot of what I've read. The majority of the way I write Todokashi's abuse/reactions to his abuse/relationships with his siblings in an abusive household comes from personal experience. I'm aware that what I have experienced varies greatly from what others have, but in my life at least, even awful parents like Endeavor still care about their kids. It might be just because of what he wants Shouto to be, but he cares. Not an excuse to do what he is doing, not a justification for abusers, and not a guilt-trip for people who have escaped abusers. Just because someone cares about you does not give them any say in your life. Affection does not equal ownership or something owed or any of that.

So the first time Endeavor has seen his kid in a week, after absolutely no contact and lots of re-examinations of their interactions to see if there was any indication Shouto does not give a shit about him, is Shouto bleeding profusely. Then Shouto fainting. Then Endeavor having to sprint to the hospital because Shouto is drowning in his own blood.

Endeavor is a.) reeling from the fact that his son is different from what he wants him to be, b.) starting to re-evaluate how he treated his son,

c.) beyond confused as to how Shouto got into this mess, and d.) worried because his kid (honestly more worried about his legacy) is dying.

Chapter 18- First Day

They all move into the dorms. Everyone stares as Todoroki fills the fridge with plastic containers with perfect portions for all his meals. They stare while he cooks for himself. They stare at the diet calendar in his room (Midoriya is like, big mood). They stare as he does his own laundry, and vacuums, and does his dishes, and takes out his trash, and sorts through mail/bills, and fixes the breakers in a storm, and fixes the plumbing in the sink once, and resets the wifi.

Todoroki is a complete dad but is trying so hard not to be a dad. Everyone is in awe of his dad powers. They keep coming up to him, “Todoroki, what does this tag mean on my clothes? I can’t work the laundry machine.” “Todoroki, my toilet is clogged, what should I do?” “Todoroki, I think I broke the vacuum.” “Todoroki, can you see if you can fix the wifi? I’m literally dying.”

He’s a goddamn 46 year old adult and he and Aizawa have managed to adopt all of these children.

TODOROKI HAS A PICTURE OF PRESENT MIC FROM A MUSIC MAGAZINE HE DID ONCE TAPED TO HIS WALL. SOMEONE SEES IT AND IS LIKE OWO. TODOROKI HAS TO PRETEND HE ISN’T ACTUALLY DYING. “YUP, THAT’S MY BIG FAT GAY CRUSH.”

Aizawa and Todoroki talk sometimes. Someone asks why Todoroki doesn’t call Aizawa dad like all the other classmates jokingly do. Todoroki replies that he sees Aizawa more as a coworker, or an uncle. Aizawa tells him that Todoroki is the biggest problem child he has ever had.

Todoroki goes to therapy. Talks about his anxiety and PTSD in the vaguest terms. Not a fan of medication so his therapist teaches him about cognitive/behavioral therapy. Learns to center himself better, breathing exercises, decompression. The main reason he has been unable to really help himself is because he constantly feels in danger. He needs to build a safe place for himself.

(Hagakure runs and grabs a pair of gloves. They are her gesturing gloves. This only happens when she is so pissed or confused about something someone did and has to express it)

HERO LICENSE. Todoroki MISSES IT BECAUSE HES WORKING AND IN PT

Todoroki pulls up to Shinsou's house to ask for a favor. Needs him to brainwash Rappa. Shinsou low key thinks it's a date for a second, until Todoroki brings him to a fucking alleyway in the middle of nowhere and pulls out this behemoth of a man.

Todoroki pulls up to supplemental hero training, sees Inasa, and fucking dies.

Okay, this entire chapter is going to be in snippits.

TODOROKI AND BAKUGOU HAVE A SEMI-EMOTIONAL CONVERSATION ABOUT BAD DREAMS/PANIC ATTACKS. TOKOYAMI??? IS HE THERE TOO? MAYBE??

Chapter 19- The End of Times

Todoroki pulls Rappa to his side somehow (SHINSOU). He infiltrates Eighth Precepts and hangs out with Eri and sends information to Genius offices/Kesagiriman agency.

Has a conversation with Kesagiriman about the Hero Killer thing again.

“What should I have done?”

“Gotten a pro but good point.”

He attends the meeting about the sting operations. Everyone is shook.

Todoroki pulls up to his first meeting at the Genius office with blood in his teeth. It's his, he's pretty sure, otherwise he'd be a hell of a lot more anxious to scrub it out. Blood carries diseases here. WAIT ITS GENTLE'S BLOOD. HE WAS BEATING THE SHIT OUT OF HIM.

There was a fight in a back alleyway he intervened with. He arrives in this scraggly ass tank top and shorts and a fucking kunai or smth.

He's doing a hell of a lot better. His panic attacks no longer hit him during the day. When he does wake up gasping, he can come back to himself better. He despises therapy but he is doing better.

Todoroki has to take the licensing extra guidance thing. Pulls up with his arm still in a sling and kicks ass. He and Inasa almost get into a fight. Time travel is fucking weird but he has crush lmao.

Midoriya: You seem really familiar...

Todoroki (disguised): You met another hero without an arm? Damn give me their number.

Lock Rock and Todoroki become best friends. They both doubt that the kids should be there. Kesagiriman stares at Todoroki like, bitch shut the fuck up. Hypocrite ass.

Todoroki is wearing a full-face mask probably. Hair is still dyed black.

Call me Sukea.

On the day of the raid, he takes out the majority of the eight expendables.

Sets it up on a timer. Has to make each of the seen fights fit perfect into his schedule. First five go well but last one spins out of control. Almost gets hit with anti-quirk drug. Manages to take out sixth and seventh but almost dies. Can still move though, because he has to fight LOV.

He and rappa chill as everyone else fights overhaul. No one loses their quirk.

THEY TURN THIS INTO A DOUBLE STING OPERATION. NOT ONLY ARE THE EIGHTH PRECEPTS TAKEN OUT, BUT WHEN LOV SENDS IN THEIR TWO FIGHTERS, TODOROKI TRACKS THEM AND TAKES OUT LOV TOO.

Good shit.

Hawkeye was not teaching Tokoyami because he was part of the sting.

End goal (Chapter 20):

Break this up into yearly segments.

One of the segments is the Inasa/Todoroki one later in the story. Split up all pieces of the chapter into a mix of social media and paragraphs? Like part two. There's a snapchat one using the pictures I've drawn.

Todoroki has to do something that revolutionizes hero activity for decades to come. Not apprehending people before disasters happen, but more of a social approach to prevent crime? Maybe he calls attention to statistics and demands change.

Todoroki proves his worth while still remaining kinda shady and maintaining his free will. He is not as tightly regulated. Does the provisional and permanent licensing exams and scores super fucking well.

He is pretty much hired on as a consultant. All Might is still teaching. Endeavor, while not being anywhere close to an example of a good human, has climbed to a semi-decent one. Todoroki and his family will never forgive the man, but all the events that went down were a sort of wake up call to his extremely narcissistic and abusive views.

Todoroki squad all meet up to hang out again. Tokoyami and Shouji are inching ever so slowly closer to dating. Kouda and Satou are the best friends ever. Hagakure has big muscles and I love her. Shinsou gets the whining kicked out of him. Everyone is more well adjusted than they were before.

Todoroki finishes his suspension thing but still hangs out at U.A.

All for One imprisoned. Shirigaki imprisoned too and treated to therapy. Overhaul gets smote.

When asked what he wants to do with his life, Todoroki replies, "Spend ten to fifteen years working as a hero before retiring and going into politics." Everyone is horrified.

Honcho graduates college. Todoroki goes to congratulate him and gets hit with a burst of inspiration (Honcho's quirk). It's invasive quirk use, but Honcho gives it as a gift.

Hagakure knows a bit more about what happened than anyone else. She's not the most intelligent person, but she is still smart. She got into U.A. after all. Todoroki takes her to one of Gayjackiechan's ring matches as a 'forgive me' present. He explains more about what happened.

Tension is resolved in Todoroki squad.

Todoroki, despite his bad track record, is used as a liaison to vigilantes and gangs. He is very good at his job. Along with Shinsou, Hagakure, Tokoyami, and some members of 1-B, he works as an underground hero. Unfortunately for Todoroki, he is very popular, which is not a good underground hero quirk. Thankfully, his disguise as the haze-producing vigilante that once went up against All for One and lived terrifies everyone.

Scene where someone points him out to a new vigilante/small time villain/gang member. "You do not want to fuck with that man. He went up against All for One and lost one arm. All for One lost both his arms. What the fuck."

Has on and off conversation with All for One. Both are geniuses of the highest level. Both have radically different view points that somehow overlap. Both have blood on their hands and all that.

Ten years later (or something like that, end this fucking thing dumbass):

Hagakure shows up in Todoroki's house at like six am. He comes down from his shower and sees her sitting at the kitchen towel. He's just in his PRESENT MIC boxers with a towel around his neck. He sighs and pulls a gallon of milk out of the fridge, taking a sip from it

Present Mic has retired. He now works full time on his radio show. On weekends, he and Jirou do a weekly news breakdown that covers mainstream stuff as well as pop culture, up coming musicians, up and coming heroes, and social good deeds. They have a hero of the week who is rarely a professional hero. Mostly people who have saved dogs or something. They invite All Might on a lot too.

Aizawa is the principle of U.A. He is amazing at it and still expels people he thinks are not giving it their all and just goofing off. Nedzu sometimes stops by for tea and is terrifying. (The only one not thoroughly creeped out by Nedzu is Todoroki probably)

Tokoyami and Shouji have finally gotten together. Shouji works rescue efforts while Tokoyami does night patrols but rarely fights anyone. He mostly creeps people out until they stop doing bad shit.

Hagakure has a passionate following and still is an amazing underground hero. Every once in a while, everyone seems to forget about her. Then, she appears out of the shadows bathed in glory for

some semi-impossible task. One time she lifted a Jeep. No one knows how she did but they are turned on. She wears a body suit every once and a while and goes to underground, illegal fighting rings to beat the snot out of people. It is good not only because she keeps her skills up (she usually does info retrieval and spy work) but the matches keep people off the streets committing crimes. She might accidentally start a fight club.

Kouda does rescue missions for hikers and others stranded in the wilderness. He is very good at it and is popular among children.

Satou runs more everyday missions but is often called in when a group needs a heavy hitter. Combined with Shinsou, he is an unstoppable force.

Shinsou uses his quirk like Tokoyami does. He is firm when someone needs to be arrested, but often stops people before crimes occur and lets them walk away. He does interrogations every once in a while and works odd jobs for the police.

Midoriya becomes number one. Bakugou becomes number two. They save everyone. Kirishima is hella gay. (Todoroki is number one for a while but gives it up?)

Uraraka does rescue missions on the side of heavy hitting missions. Every once in a while, she goes on regular patrol but she is in high demand from hero agencies everywhere.

All Might does TED Talks and inspires people. He throws himself into social reform and charity work. Everyone loves him. He does not use up the embers of One for All in his last fight and they power him through many, many more years.

Tsukauchi retires to the countryside and owns an orchard. All the grandmas around the area love him because he helps do farm stuff. It is good for him to decompress. Knowing when everyone is lying is not a light burden.

No one knows what Nedzu does, but sometimes he shows up and laughs maniacally. Other times he takes tea with Todoroki. Every six months he, Todoroki, and All for One get together to debate each other.

All for One passes away in his sleep in about seven years. Todoroki is strangely fond of the man who took his arm. He does not cry though, because that is not who he is.

Whenever Todoroki gets a break from hero work, he travels. His siblings are all doing great in their careers. His mom was transferred to a different psych ward and actually helped through her trauma. There are family gatherings (minus Endeavor). Todoroki still does not know what to do with them and the feelings he has.

There are family gatherings with Endeavor (minus the rest of the family). Todoroki does not care for the man, he does not waste emotion, but the man has resources. He has retired and only pokes at Todoroki's career choices ever so often. Other times he awkwardly asks about boys (Todoroki says that it is not his business by so many levels). It's by no means a great relationship, but it is something like an ambivalent one. He tells Endeavor about Gai/Inasa sometime nonchalantly and Endeavor chokes on food and Todoroki is just sitting there not giving a shit. Todoroki does not originally know how to deal with Endeavor and the man's pride. He cannot beat him down, as Endeavor will find pride in creating someone to beat him. He has to find another way to shake the man down a peg.

Endeavor complies with all of Fuyumi's terms and settles in court for years of domestic abuse. Todoroki insisted this only wait until Endeavor had reached the end of when he could be helpful. Endeavor calls him cruel with something like a smile. Todoroki replies that he is just logical. The case opens conversation about hero behavior and there are much more thorough investigations.

Tokoyami finally appears on Mina's youtube channel. Tsuyu's twitter is still fire. Yuyu graduates and works support designing costumes for a ton of heroes. Eventually, she and Aoyama collab on a fashion line that somehow turns out amazing. Sadboizz gets his medical license and becomes Todoroki's doctor of choice. Giran is smote but also gets his services bought out (semi-legally) by Todoroki, using his personal funds, not government ones. In return he is provided with a shit ton more information. Some of it works its way over to Midoriya who freaks out a bit and really likes the analysis.

Dronehead still keeps in contact but is still very resistant to meeting up or settling down. Todoroki just keeps an eye on him and every once in a while sets Midoriya on him to get very top secret information.

Sharkfuckah eventually becomes the owner of his own restaurant. Todoroki patrons it a bit.

They all meet up to hang out (even if Todoroki did technically

graduate into consultant work at the end of their first year).

It is getting better. Crime rates steadily drop and social issues (gay rights, quirkless suicide rates, villainization of some quirks) are steadily resolved.

Todoroki goes into politics and everyone is rightly terrified. His exhaustive knowledge of history, political movements, and military strategy make him near unbeatable on the debate floor. He spearheads movements.

His ability to be a hero is called into question a few times on account of the loss of his arm, his PTSD, the loss of his eye, and his sexuality. Herofeed and other progressive magazines finally seem to recognize what a powerful symbol he is. "Todoroki Shouto is a Gay, Disabled, Neurologically Atypical Man who is Revolutionizing the Hero Industry" A girlboss move, if you will.

After his hero career, he stops repeating that he is not a symbol or a straw man and starts to really collect the movement to normalize queer relationships and such into a powerful thing. Either a political party completely changes in the public eye or a new one is created for him specifically.

It all works out in the end.

Tokoyami lives vicariously through Todoroki and one day styles his hair, puts on his makeup, and puts him in a choker. The pictures are posted on Instagram. Everyone is shaking

He marries Inasa and they have seven dogs and are very much in love.

Additional side stories:

Gai as Midoriya

Kabuto with a quirk that brings him back from death but gives him a birthmark where he died (was killed during that battle with Itachi). His journey to break away from Orochimaru's shadow and grow into himself. He grows up in foster care, graduates around the time of All Might from the general department and goes into a medical career. Flies through the boards incredibly quickly. Gets wrapped up in the All for One business and outsmarts the fucker. Brings a new age in a more violent way.

Sakura as Hagakure. She is used to being invisible but she is going to fight for every inch this time from the beginning.

Kakashi as Aizawa. Very short, please do not go overboard.

Neji as Aizawa. Yes. I love it

Sasuke as Tokoyami? Wow edgy

Orochimaru as Toga

Au: todokashi disappears when he's a kid and starts working for the lov

Meets Aizawa at one of present mics charity balls. Asks to dance and drops his packet of information. Reveals that he needs a way out. Gives a good amount of information in return for more info later. Aizawa agrees to help. Later, gainasa comes to talk to Aizawa. Multiple forces trying to get to todokashi. His dad too but Aizawa doesn't know who todokashi is so that's difficult. His sister and brothers want him back. Dabi is the one who convinced him to join. Todokashi is slowly taking the league to pieces. He looks terrible. Hes thin, has bruises under his eyes, his cheekbones are sharp. This is todokashi without his siblings and his friends. One who never learns how to trust until he reaches out to Aizawa. Tragic fucking au but ends well. Todokashi is a fucking wreck

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